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# WELCOME



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Sowing time has finally arrived and to celebrate we have a four-page special feature starting on page 49 designed to inspire and help you get the best from your seeds. The team has also been busy testing sowing kit designed to make the job easier – turn to page 92 to discover our verdict.

Crop rotation can seem a good idea in theory, but complicated in practice. However, with our simple guide, starting on page 42, to hand you should never have to scratch your head when deciding where to plant your onions again.

Also in this issue KG regular Anne Swithinbank reveals her top 10 most irritating weeds and how to cope with them, while Ben Vanheems has some novel ways to grow that old favourite, the tomato.

Winner of the Big Allotment Challenge, Rob Smith, dropped into the KG offices for a cuppa recently. You can read our exclusive interview with him starting on page 66, and finally, to welcome in the spring, don't miss your chance to win one of more than £3300-worth of prizes including fabulous WoodBlocX raised bed kits!

*Steve*

**Steve Ott, editor**

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## YOUR EXPERTS IN THIS ISSUE INCLUDE:



**GABY BARTAI**

This month gardening journalist and organic gardener, Gaby, visits a group of gardening activists. Against all odds they are working to save a former market garden from becoming Heathrow's third runway.



**BOB FLOWERDEW**

Organic gardening guru Bob is a familiar voice on Radio 4's Gardeners' Question Time. This month he answers questions on stone fruits from pips, raised beds and controlling ants on the plot.



**JOE MAIDEN**

KG regular Joe is a veteran gardener and broadcaster in his home county of North Yorks. This month he reveals some simple ways to produce quick crops in pots from pea shoots to onions and salads.



**ANDREW TOKELY**

Professional grower and keen allotment gardener, Andrew brings us the latest of his guides for beginners. In this issue he looks at climbing French beans, an easy crop to grow and very prolific.



**CHARLES DOWDING**

Never one to take things as read, this month no-dig expert Charles turns his attention to crop spacing. Just how much can you fit in your patch and still maintain the quality of your produce at harvest time?



**ANNA PETTIGREW**

Keen cook and photographer Anna brings us more mouthwatering recipes using seasonal produce. This month she has some delicious ideas for dishes using fresh asparagus, radishes and rhubarb.

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# JOBS THIS MONTH

TASKS TO CARRY OUT ON YOUR PATCH AND UNDER COVER IN APRIL



## 10-MINUTE JOBS FOR APRIL

### HOE WEEDS

Weeds will be growing quickly now and should be controlled while still small. Hoe annual types regularly, keeping the blade just below soil level. Choose a dry day if possible and move backwards as you work to avoid treading the roots back into the soil where they could survive to regrow.

### CONTROL PESTS

Aphids (greenfly and blackfly) will often appear in numbers this month and should be removed before they build up and start to damage your crops. Spray with a suitable insecticide, choosing an organic option if you prefer or, where practical, rub the pests from the shoots with a finger and thumb.

### BUILD BEAN SUPPORTS

It is too early to plant out climbing runner and French beans since they are not frost hardy, but you can get the supports they will need in place. These should be sturdy enough to support the crop in full growth – a double row or wigwam of canes is ideal, but you can also buy or build a more permanent structure.

### WATCH FOR FROSTS

Frosts occur until the beginning of June for many of us and far beyond in northerly districts. Tender plants are vulnerable to damage and should be protected on cold nights with layers of winter weight fleece or cloches. Hardy plants which have been hardened off can be planted out in milder areas now. Cover on cold nights.



## SOW RUNNER BEANS

Runner beans can be sown in deep pots and trays this month for planting out at the end of May/beginning of June. Delay if necessary to coincide with the end of frosts in your area. It is important not to sow too early or the tops of the plants will begin to twist together and they are very difficult to untangle without breaking the slender shoots, although they will shoot from the joint if this happens.

Sow into Rootainers or cell trays with large cells or individually into 9cm (3½in) pots filled with any good multi-purpose compost. Try to keep the scar on the bottom of the seed facing downwards since it is from here that the first root will emerge. Sow your seeds about 2.5cm (1in) deep and cover with more compost. Water thoroughly and place in a heated propagator set at 15°C (60°F).

Check your trays or pots each day and water any dry patches. Open the ventilators in the lid on warm days and wipe the condensation from



inside the lid every morning.

Once the majority of beans have germinated remove the propagator lid and stand the plants on the greenhouse bench at a minimum temperature of 7-10°C (45-50°F) until the frosts are over.



### SOW NOW

Carrots, peas, broad beans, French beans, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflowers, celery, kale, endive, kohlrabi, leeks, salsify/ scorzonera, Florence fennel, cardoons, summer/winter cabbage, oriental cabbages, beetroot, chard/leaf beet, lettuce, parsnips, radish, spinach, spring onions, turnips, asparagus, salad leaves, land cress



### PLANT NOW

Asparagus, onions/shallots second early/maincrop potatoes, artichokes (globe/Jerusalem/Chinese)



### HARVEST NOW

Asparagus, chard/leaf beet, winter lettuce, broccoli, spring cabbage, late Brussels sprouts, winter cabbage/Savoy, winter cauliflowers, forced chicory, forced seakale, rhubarb, endive, kale, leeks, spinach, radish, turnip greens, salad leaves

# ON THE VEG PATCH



## EARTH UP POTATOES

Early potatoes planted last month may be shooting through the soil now and so are exposed to any frost. Earthing them up, pulling soil up and over the shoots, keeps them protected. However, it can also encourage bigger crops. This is because potato tubers form on underground stems (stolons) that grow from the main stem. The longer the length of stem, the more stolons on which tubers can form. Earthing up also kills weeds. Simply use a hoe or spade to pull the soil from between the rows and up the stems to cover the shoots completely, taking care not to expose any tubers forming below ground. Do this 2-3 times.

## KG TOP TIP

We are in the hungry gap this month – the period when new sowings have yet to mature, while last season's crops are mostly over. If your basket is empty make a note to sow more late maturing broccoli, chard, leeks, cauliflower and spring cabbages this spring/summer.

## SPRING CABBAGE

Spring cabbage is one of the few fresh veg available at this time of year and well worth growing. Heads should be ready for harvesting from now until the beginning of June from a July or August sowing the previous season. Until you do need them, keep up the slug protection and net the heads against birds. Sow summer cabbage varieties such as 'Hispi', 'Derby Day' and 'Greyhound' now.



## KALE

Kale is a very hardy veg containing lots of vitamins and iron. Varieties include the popular 'Nero di Toscana', curly kale, and also the colourful 'Red Russian'. Sow from now until the end of May. Sowing two batches at monthly intervals will spread cropping a little. Either sow in trays or nursery rows in the open garden, thinning gradually to leave 45cm (18in) between plants.



## LEEKS

Leeks are a stalwart of the winter garden. Like kale they are very hardy, but unlike it they do not suffer the attentions of birds and are very easy to look after. Sow now in short nursery rows in the open veg patch, lifting and moving on into their permanent growing positions in June/July when about pencil thick. Young leeks are delicious at this stage, so if you have too many use them young to add a mild onion flavour to soups and stews.



## APRIL TASKS



## SOW FENNEL

Not to everyone's taste, but Florence fennel is an attractive and useful plant, with a strong aniseed flavour. All parts are edible, including the seeds, which is useful since plants do have a habit of running to seed if they become dry or stressed during the summer.

Sow from April onwards in a sunny spot providing the soil is warm enough (a minimum of 13°C/55°F), otherwise delay until May. Seeds can also be sown in cell trays, but must not become pot bound before planting.

## PLANT ONIONS

Onions grown from seeds sown back in January should be ready for planting out about now. Choose a sunny, well drained site and preferably one that has been manured the previous autumn. Plant about 10cm (4in) apart each way. Thin every other one as they mature, using the thinnings in the kitchen. Keep the rows weed free at all times, hand weeding around the bulbs as they are very easily damaged with the hoe.



## TOP TIP

Harvest asparagus with a sharp knife, cutting the spears 5-8cm (2-3in) below soil level once they are 10-13cm (4-5in) tall. Check the bed regularly for new shoots as they grow very quickly and will soon become too large for eating. Stop cutting by mid-June to allow the rest to form ferns to feed the crowns for next season.

## PRUNE CHERRY TREES

Cherries and other stone fruit such as plums, damsons, apricots, peaches and nectarines can be pruned now that the sap is rising to help keep diseases such as bacterial canker and silver leaf out of the wounds. In all cases keep pruning to a minimum to reduce the risk of infection.

In the case of bush cherries, remove any crossing or damaged branches or those growing into the middle of the tree. In the case of fan-trained cherry trees, cut back the main branches or ribs of the tree by a third until the plant has filled its allotted space. Further pruning of the sideshoots is carried out in the summer when three evenly spaced laterals on each main branch are allowed to grow and supported with canes, the rest are cut back to six leaves, then three after harvest. Plums, damsons, gages and apricots are treated in much the same way, but peaches and nectarines are different. They fruit on last season's wood, so cut up to a third of the two to three-year-old growth back to a replacement shoot.



## MORE QUICK JOBS FOR FRUIT GROWERS

■ Harvest established rhubarb crowns regularly from now until the end of July when they will need a rest to build up their strength for the following year. In some seasons crowns may produce flower spikes and these should be removed as soon as seen to prevent plants wasting energy on trying to produce unwanted seeds. Never remove too many stalks at once – leave half a dozen or so to continue to feed the plant.

■ Feed blueberries with a liquid or granular feed for ericaceous

(lime-hating) plants to get them off to the best possible start. Repeat this at monthly intervals throughout the growing season.

■ If you haven't already done so, feed grapevines and kiwi fruit with a general purpose feed such as Growmore or pelleted chicken manure and follow this with a mulch of well-rotted garden compost or manure.

■ Treat container grown strawberries with Nemasys Vine Weevil Killer as soon as the compost reaches 5°C (41°F).



## LETTUCE TIPS

■ By sowing in succession every month and choosing your varieties carefully you can have regular harvests of fresh leaves for much of the year.

■ Sow a small number of seeds of a hearting variety now and also a few of a loose leaf type such as 'Salad Bowl'. The latter will provide regular cut and come again harvests while you wait for the hearts to develop on the rest.

■ Sow thinly onto the surface of fresh multi-purpose or sowing compost or direct into well prepared soil on the veg patch. Only sow half a row every two to four weeks to avoid gluts since once plants go to seed they are inedible.

■ If sowing in trays or pots cover only lightly with vermiculite or sieved compost since light can aid germination.





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## TOP TIPS FOR APRIL

- Water regularly and don't just dampen the surface. It's worth soaking the subsoil before planting tomatoes
- Mark courgette planting points with a 60cm (2ft) stick. That way you will know where to water when plants grow so big that the stem is hidden by leaves
- Use a liquid feed on strawberry plants and put netting over to protect fruit from birds
- If buying in tomato, pepper and cucumber plants, buy early while you have the pick of strong, healthy ones



# IN THE GREENHOUSE



WITH  
JOYCE  
RUSSELL

Pictures by  
Ben Russell

## PLANTS WITH LONG ROOTS

Deep pots are a good idea for raising plants with long roots. Sweetcorn and sweet peas are immediate candidates that come to mind, and Roottrainers are a really useful system. These split plastic cells have enough depth to accommodate long roots and they can be opened to release the rootball from the inside. It's easy to take a peek and see if roots are restricted and the system can be reused for several years.



## MARIGOLDS

Flowers look pretty in the greenhouse, but some can also help to protect other crops from pests. French marigolds help to repel whitefly, which can be a nuisance in a confined space. Sow seed now to raise plenty of young plants. I like to plant these in rows near strawberry and tomato plants.

Sow seed thinly on the surface of good compost and keep at 15°C (60°F) until the seedlings appear. Protect young plants if temperatures fall below 8°C (46°F) and keep compost damp rather than wet. Marigolds will flower right through until autumn frosts.

## GROWING TIPS

- Start to harden off tomatoes a week before planting out; move them out of the propagator during the day for a start and then move them out altogether, but cover on cold nights.
- Opt to buy aubergines, peppers etc if you haven't sown seed before now.
- Keep moving plants to larger pots if they outgrow smaller ones. Compost is exhausted after about six weeks.
- Sow sprouts, kale, leeks, cabbage, Florence fennel, broccoli, cauliflower, swede etc in trays under cover. These will benefit from a protected start in life and can be planted outdoors in a few weeks' time.



## SOWING & PLANTING GUIDE

	FAVOURITE VARIETIES	HOW TO START
<b>SWEETCORN</b>	'Lark', 'Ovation', 'Swift'	Sow seed individually in deep pots. 1cm (½in) deep. 20°C (68°F)
<b>PUMPKINS/SQUASH</b>	'Small Sugar', 'Uchiki Kuri', 'Crown Prince'	Sow seed individually in 13cm (5in) pots. 1.5cm (1in) deep. 20°C (68°F)
<b>CLIMBING FRENCH BEANS</b>	'Fasold', 'Blauhilde', 'Neckar Queen'	Sow seed singly in 8cm (3in) pots or 5cm (2in) apart in large tubs. 15°C (59°F)
<b>CUCUMBERS</b>	'Carmen', 'Bella', 'Flamingo', 'Cumlaude', 'Burpless' varieties	Sow early in the month, 1cm (½in) deep in 8cm pots. 20°C (68°F)
<b>BASIL</b>	'Sweet Genovese', 'Sweet Green', 'Red Ruben'	Sow 3-4 seeds per cell, cover. 20°C (68°F)
<b>FRENCH BEANS</b>	'Speedy', 'Delinel', 'Nomad', 'Slenderette'	Sow 5cm (2in) apart in deep tubs. 15°C (59°F)
<b>COURGETTE</b>	'Defender', 'Parthanon', 'Venus'	Sow one seed per 8cm (3in) pot. 20°C (68°F)
<b>PURPLE SPROUTING BROCCOLI</b>	'Claret', 'Early Purple Sprouting', 'Romanesco'	Sow thinly in trays. 10-15°C (50-59°F)
<b>SALAD LEAVES</b>	Rocket, leaf mixes etc.	Sow little and often in drills or start lettuce in pots

## MAKE SPACE

The greenhouse can seem crowded at this time of year and at times it's hard to know how everything will fit in. The secret is always to clear crops when they approach the end of production and not to cherish space-hoggers for the sake of small pickings.

- Be tidy, always remove dead and diseased foliage and fit trays and pots in among other plants if you need to.
- Raise pots of seedlings up on frames or wire trays so they receive more light and are less likely to be attacked by slugs.
- Stick to the plan you have drawn for where everything will go.
- If you need to plant tomatoes out before all the cabbages clear, you can get away with a bit of a mix as long as small plants aren't overshadowed by larger ones. I often leave a row of salad in the wide spacing between tomato poles. By the time the tomatoes need the space, the salad will have been used.
- Look forward to the new things you are growing; they will crop before too long and you really won't miss the old, tired or tough ones.



- Chard and spinach can grow to enormous proportions. The leaves and stems get a little coarser when big, so pick, make dishes for the freezer and remove bolting plants before they keel over and squash smaller ones.

## HARVEST

There should be plenty to harvest and it's important to keep picking in order to get the best from each plant. Some April favourites are: Florence fennel, Swiss chard, spinach, sprouting broccoli, salad leaves, radishes, kohlrabi, mangetout peas, broad beans, spring cabbage, beetroot and possibly the first strawberries, potatoes and baby carrots if you sowed very early and the weather is kind.

## TOMATOES

My rule is to plant tomatoes out at the end of April. Don't dither. They are better off in the ground than struggling in small pots. If nights are cold, it's possible to wrap plants in bags, bubble wrap or horticultural fleece.

Tomatoes can be the star performers of the greenhouse; give them lots of compost, some sticks or string for support, plenty of light and air, and plants will grow very well. Which brings us to watering: If you don't have a watering system in place and don't want to stand for hours sprinkling water round these thirsty plants, try sinking a cut-off plastic bottle (with the lid removed), or milk carton, beside each one. It doesn't take long to fill these with water; this soaks down into the soil and reaches the roots.



## TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Cape gooseberries do well under cover and can rather take over in milder, frost-free areas. They make an attractive plant covered with orange, paper-skinned lanterns. The edible fruit is on the inside of these structures.

Sow seed from mid-March to mid-April. Sow three seeds to a pot at 15°C (59°F) and pinch out the weakest seedlings to leave the strongest to grow on. Plant into a large pot, or the border soil, when 15cm (6in) tall and after all risk of frost is passed.





# HOT TOPICS

NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF GROWING YOUR OWN FRUIT AND VEG

## £6000 JACKPOT TO GROW WORLD BEATING 'GIGANTOMO'

The giant vegetable competition at Harrogate Autumn Flower Show is set to take a gigantic step forward with the launch of a brand new national class for tremendous tomatoes, offering a top prize of up to £6000 for the winning specimen.

The new National Championship for 'Gigantomo' beefsteak tomatoes is being sponsored by mail order plant specialist Van Meuwen to celebrate the launch of the new variety in Europe. A top prize of £1000 is being offered exclusively for the heaviest 'Gigantomo' staged at the Harrogate event, with a further £5000 if the winning tomato tips the world record scales.

The autumn giant veg competition already attracts growers from across the UK, weighing in for an annual battle of the bulge in classes for the heaviest and the longest. Also home of the National Heavy Onion Championship sponsored by *Kitchen Garden*, the show has celebrated numerous world records in the past, including two new world records and a new British record in 2014.

'Gigantomo' is a disease-resistant beefsteak variety which can be harvested from mid-summer. It can reach over 1.8m (6ft) tall, producing fruits up to 25cm (10in). It is the result of almost two decades of research and development by breeders in the UK and the US. 'Gigantomo' is supplied as seeds (six seeds for £3.99) and plug plants (five for £14.99) from [www.vanmeuwen.com](http://www.vanmeuwen.com)

Full schedules for the 2015 North of England Horticultural Society's Fruit and Vegetable Show, including the giant veg classes, will be available from February. Visit [www.flowershow.org.uk](http://www.flowershow.org.uk)



## GARDENING IN LYCRA?

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and Coventry University have launched a joint study to look at the effects gardening tools, combined with different gardening tasks, have on the physical health of gardeners.

The research, the first of its kind in the UK, aims to identify the best gardening tasks for maintaining healthy bones, muscles and joints, and to assess the performance of a range of gardening tools to see if they can be redesigned to reduce the risk of injury.

Professional and amateur gardeners of all ages visited the university's state of the art motion capture lab, where experts in the

School of Art and Design monitored them performing activities such as digging and pruning. Coventry's 12-camera motion capture lab – which requires the subject to wear a Lycra body suit fitted with reflective sensors – recorded the movements of the gardeners to enable the researchers to calculate the loads in their bodies during the activities.

Dr Paul Alexander, head of horticultural and environmental science at the Royal Horticultural Society, said: "The health benefits of gardening are difficult to quantify but by using the motion capture laboratory at Coventry University, we hope to be able to better understand the effects different gardening tasks and tools have on the human body."



## RHS BEGINS SEARCH FOR THE NATION'S MOST PASSIONATE SCHOOL GARDENERS

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Campaign for School Gardening has launched its annual search for the most talented and inspiring school gardeners in the fourth RHS School Gardeners of the Year competition.

Schools across the UK are invited to nominate their gardening stars for three coveted awards – RHS Young School Gardener of the Year, RHS School Gardening Champion of the Year and RHS School Gardening Team of the Year. Shortlisted nominees will then be required to make a short video demonstrating their love of gardening which will be watched by an experienced judging panel headed up by ITV's Love Your Garden presenter Frances Tophill.

This year's top prize for the winning RHS School Gardening Team of the Year is a greenhouse worth £2644, donated by Keder Greenhouses. Additional prizes for all three categories include £500 in gardening vouchers, tools, gardening gloves, tickets to an RHS Flower Show and fantastic opportunities such as the chance to work alongside RHS gardeners for a day or a visit from Frances to help out in their school garden.

In 2014 the search for a young gardening talent between the ages of five and 16 was won by George Hassall, aged nine, from Buckton Vale Primary School in Carrbrook, Tameside, Greater Manchester. George wowed judges with his infectious enthusiasm and impressive knowledge of gardening, and has since been a guest



speaker at a horticultural careers conference and made debut TV and radio appearances on BBC's The One Show and BBC Radio Manchester. To enter the competition, schools should head to the RHS Campaign for School Gardening website at [rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening](http://rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening)

All 20 finalists' videos from 2014 can be viewed on the RHS Campaign for School Gardening's YouTube page at [youtube.com/rhsschoolgardening](http://youtube.com/rhsschoolgardening)

## BIG ALLOTMENT CHALLENGE JUDGE JOINS EDIBLE GARDEN SHOW

The BBC's Big Allotment Challenge floral expert Jonathan Moseley will be demonstrating his own displays at The Edible Garden Show — the UK's only national event dedicated to grow your own.

The leading floral designer will be appearing in the Experts Theatre on Saturday and Sunday, March 21-22. During his sessions, Jonathan will be demonstrating how spectacular edible floral masterpieces can be made with great speed and efficiency. With materials sourced from his own garden, he will share his love and knowledge of his edible plant materials and explain in detail how designs are created.

Jonathan said: "I'm delighted to have been asked to present at this year's Edible Garden Show. It'll be a real treat to whet people's appetites with a range of stunning floral arrangements that really are good enough to eat."

Jonathan's appearance is just one of a number of new features to go live when The Edible Garden Show returns to Alexandra Palace, March 20-22. The show, which boasts a brand new sister event, Good Life Live, has something for all the family and is packed with not-to-be-missed exhibits featuring a broad range of grow your own products as well as outdoor living activities and experiences.

Organisers have hugely increased the interactivity of this year's show so visitors can enjoy over 11 attraction areas compared to three in 2014. Children will be able to get their hands dirty in the Potting Shed, learn how to create wooden badges, bake bread and make their own butter in the Make it! area. They can even hold baby chicks in the Chicken Coop, have a field day on the Village Green, meet the animals in the pop-up City Farm or get creative in the Family Zone.

■ To book your tickets, which give access to both The Edible Garden Show and Good Life Live, please call the ticket hotline on 0871 230 3451 or visit [www.theediblegardenshow.co.uk](http://www.theediblegardenshow.co.uk). Admission free for under 16s.



Asparagus  
'Amaro Montana'

## ASPARAGUS MYSTERY

Sales of D.T. Brown's five varieties of asparagus crowns have exceeded all expectations. From August to December 2014 sales have risen by a staggering 400% against the same period in 2013.

D.T. Brown's Tim Jeffries is mystified: "I know asparagus is becoming increasingly popular with gardeners, and while it was once regarded as demanding and difficult more people now appreciate it is actually quite a straightforward crop, but I am at a loss to account for such an enormous increase in sales. I'd be interested to know if anyone can shed any light on the mystery!"

Visit [www.dtbrownseeds.co.uk](http://www.dtbrownseeds.co.uk)

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## MAGGIE'S LAUNCHES THE POP-UP GARDEN FESTIVAL AT LLANOVER

Maggie's, the charity which offers free practical, emotional and social support to people with cancer and their family and friends, is transforming the beautiful gardens at Llanover, near Abergavenny, for a Pop-Up Garden Festival with a difference.

At the invitation of Elizabeth and Ross Murray, the gardens will become a hub of horticultural activity for one weekend only, from September 11-13, 2015. All proceeds from the event will go to Maggie's which is fundraising to open its second centre in Wales built alongside the Velindre Cancer Centre in Cardiff.

In the spectacular setting of the Llanover gardens and arboretum, the Maggie's Pop-Up Garden Festival will launch with a gala dinner on the evening of Friday, September 11. The weekend continues from there with talks, workshops and demonstrations, including a programme for children and a wide range of stalls, all showcasing the very best of gardening talent and expertise.

■ Tickets for day entry to the gardens will be £8 and hour-long sessions with the guest gardeners will be an additional £8 each. The full programme and tickets will be available from April 2015 on the Maggie's website [www.maggiescentres.org/llanoverfestival](http://www.maggiescentres.org/llanoverfestival)



## MOUNT STEWART'S PREVIOUSLY UNSEEN WALLED GARDEN

Mount Stewart's world famous house and gardens are set to be reunited with their historic demesne after more than 50 years.

The National Trust has announced plans which will see the area which the conservation charity looks after increase from 100 to 1000 acres. This means that Mount Stewart, on the shores of Strangford Lough in Northern Ireland, will soon boast a range of exciting new features, including a previously unseen walled garden and dairy.

The conservation charity is now fundraising for the restoration of the two acre garden, which will include rebuilding of the potting shed, dairy and glasshouse, as part of its walled garden appeal, with the aim of getting back into production by 2016. The walled garden at Mount Stewart was built during the late 18th century. The planned restoration work is estimated to amount to £400,000.

The garden is also home to an historic glasshouse, home to the ancient 'White Syrian' vine. The vine, which is nearly 250 years old, is the oldest in Ireland and the second oldest in the UK, planted one year after the Hampton Court vine, which dates back to 1768.

■ If you would like to donate to the National Trust's walled garden appeal, visit [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/walledgardens](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/walledgardens)



## MORE LOCALLY GROWN FOOD FOR WALES

The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG) says new guidance about the provision of community gardens and allotments in Wales could mean a surge in fresh, locally grown food in Welsh communities.

The move comes after a Welsh Government consultation process which analysed the responses of the FCFCG in Wales. One of the major announcements is that the Welsh Government will seek to find a way to improve waiting list arrangements for allotments and of providing information

on existing community growing projects – helping to remove barriers preventing new groups from starting up.

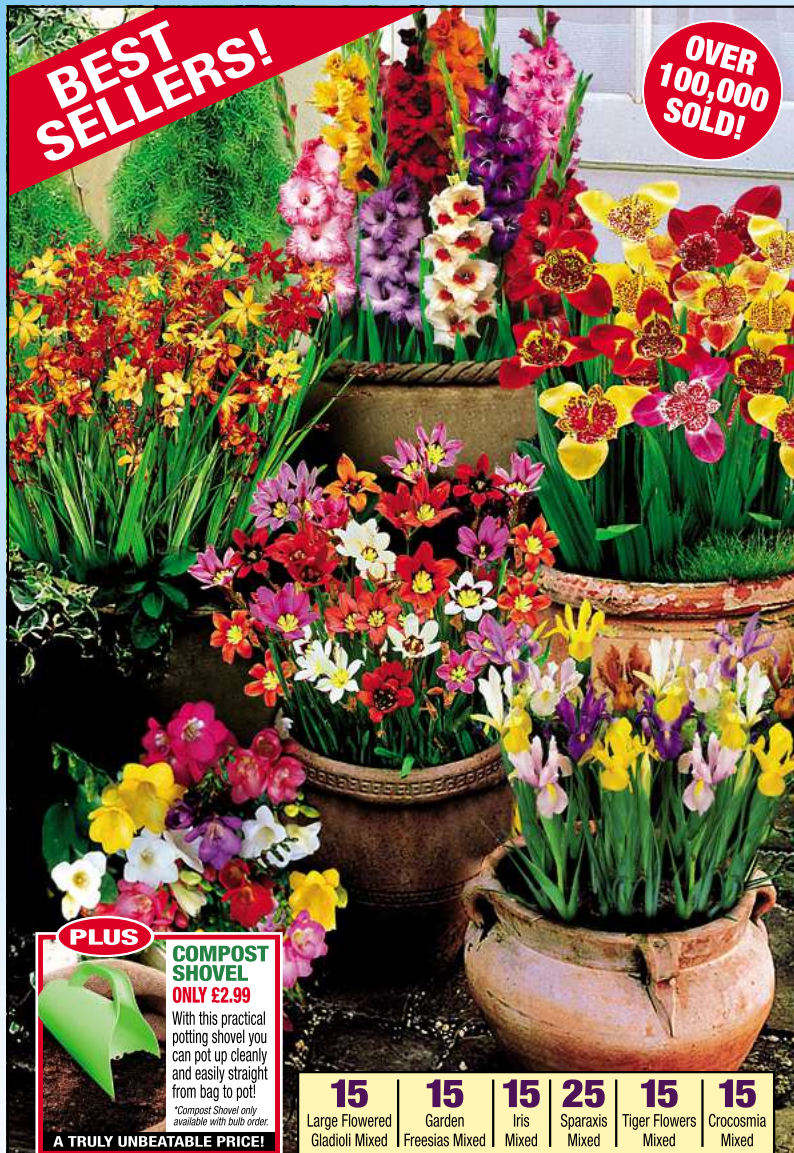
Allotment waiting lists in some areas of Wales run to 10 years or more, and community projects often struggle to get off the ground for lack of available land to grow on. Local authorities and other major public landowners know the benefits that community growing schemes can bring, and any measures that can help them to enable growers to utilise underused land for productive community use is to be welcomed.



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## VINDALOO BUG BASHER

My objective was to have an organic vegetable garden and source all my family vegetable needs from there. Two years back my project failed. My plants succumbed to some garden bug since I did not want to use any pesticide. Last year, based on my research on ethnic Indian farming, I came across two remedies for garden bugs. The first one I call the Garden Vindaloo!

Take equal portions (half a porridge bowl) of green chillies and garlic. Grind them into a paste separately. Mix them together into 10 litres (2.2 gallons) of water. Let it soak overnight. Strain it the next morning and spray the liquid over the leaves and soil. Do this once every two weeks. I alternated this with Neem oil (*Azadirachta indica*). I got the oil from India but you can get it online from retailer Amazon. This needs to be diluted with water and sprayed. Alternating these two options prevents bugs from developing resistance to them. Got a good crop last year.

Padmasini Dayananda, Dorset



# HAVE YOUR SAY

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## SWINTON INSPIRATION

Reading about Swinton Park Garden was a delight. I've seen similar gardens before but on a smaller scale. Swinton Park is an inspiration – lovely veg and fruit among the huge diversity of insects and, just what we need, large quantities of bees. That alone justifies this marvellous place.

After reading this article, I feel the encouragement to grow more wild flowers on my veg plot at the top of the garden. Another useful factor is the comparatively low maintenance required. What a change from the TV when one sees a huge garden supposedly maintained by the owner – when obviously this can't be possible. Working at Swinton Park must be bliss.

Michael Bird, Plymouth



## MUSHROOM MAGIC

I have got a rather tired looking polytunnel on my allotment – the outside has seen better days and the soil was looking distinctly unimpressive.

I knew that I would be a bit late now if I put some fresh manure down – I needed something I could use without giving myself more problems as a result. And this is where I remembered reading an article about mushroom compost.

I live in the Midlands and I thought that it wouldn't be too easy to find a mushroom growing farm. How wrong I was.

A short Google search gave me exactly what I was looking for, a place (Livesey Brothers) close to Ashby-de-la-Zouch. After an easy drive, I arrived and straight away saw a neat stack of sacks by the reception. Priced very reasonably at £2.50, I managed with the guy from the shop to load 10 of them into the back of my Polo. Amazing what you can fit into a small car when you put your mind to it. And they sell fresh mushrooms too; the result was a delicious barley mushroom risotto for lunch today.



I hope my photo shows the dark brown of the compost. The mushrooms were delicious and I can secretly hope that the compost might give me a few of them after I put a couple of sacks into my greenhouse and polytunnel.

Helena Johnson, Coventry

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## 'CRIMSON CRUSH'

I have been distressed by some of the misinformation being promulgated regarding the new blight-resistant variety 'Crimson Crush', now being sold as plants by Suttons.

'Crimson Crush' is a new F1 hybrid, using one parent licensed from a university programme in the US and another parent line developed in the UK.

The UK parent was selected for blight resistance (*Phytophthora infestans*) and general resistance to disease along with good eating quality and flavour. Trials of a number of new hybrids were carried out at the University of Bangor in North Wales in order to assess their relative

resistance to blight, along with other characteristics such as earliness to ripen and eating quality. 'Crimson Crush' remained relatively free of blight but it is not immune, showing around 10% infection when controls like 'Ailsa Craig' were 100% infected.

The hybrid utilises two blight resistance genes and this combination seems to give reasonably reliable and robust resistance. 'Crimson Crush' produces fruit weighing approximately 110 grams (4oz) and had a Brix (sugar content) reading of 5.3% in cold greenhouse trials in 2014. This compares favourably with 5.4% for 'Shirley'.

*Simon Crawford, plant breeder,  
East Yorkshire*



## IDEAL 'ILDI'

You asked for comments from readers regarding growing 'Sweet Aperitif' (KG, March 2015).

I grew 'Sweet Aperitif' last year on my allotment in Oxford. Last summer seems quite far away now but my results with this tomato were not too wonderful. Yes, they were sweet, but not very prolific. I didn't achieve 'up to 150 fruits per plant if grown in a greenhouse' (from the back of the Thompson & Morgan seed packet), but then I did grow the tomatoes outside in clay soil.

It was a good summer for tomatoes and the 'Sweet Aperitif' were sweet but not especially so. It is true to say



that they were outflanked by 'Ildi' from D T Brown seeds, free with *Kitchen Garden*. As a rule, I hate yellow tomatoes but couldn't ignore the free packet of seeds. The most intriguing thing about 'Ildi' was

how long they lasted in the fruit bowl without seeming to age. All the tomatoes were fed with a home-made comfrey liquid fertiliser. I hope 2015 is as good.

*Julie Freeman, Oxford*

## PARSNIPS PULLING THEIR WEIGHT

I thought you might like to have a peep at these two heavyweight parsnips lifted this morning, February 9. One weighs 3lb 9oz, the other 2lb 9oz. The whole row produced extraordinary heavy forked roots.

The seed was sown at the end of February last year in paper tubes filled with run-of-the-mill soil, nothing special. What may interest your readers is that I mixed a little GroChar in the planting compost as it has been my practice to do with all brassicas. The results have been amazing: the white cabbage 'Kilaxy' produced heads the size of footballs.

*Leslie Harvey, London*

## LORD OLIVER OF COMPTON TO THE RESCUE

Being the first day of February recently, I decided it was time to sort through my seeds, diligently collected and stored in an old fat-ball bucket. As you can see, I had a helper – about 20 seconds after I started. Needless to say, the task took longer than expected.

*Jacci Gooding,  
Warwickshire*





# Kitchen Garden

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## FROM THE FORUM:



## MUCH ADO ABOUT MULCHING

**BITZY66:** I have been thinking of mulching around the veg plot. I can get my hands on lots of well-rotted manure from a farm up the road for free or they sell hay by the big bale. Which would be better to retain the moisture if we get any decent weather this year?

**MIKE VOGEL:** My own choice would be to use straw or hay for mulch and spread the manure in the autumn to be worked into the soil over winter by the worms. I myself buy straw from a local farm and use that in conjunction with newspaper and cardboard packaging which people throw away. Both these restore carbon to the soil and cardboard acts as a great weed-inhibitor in early spring. Not bindweed though; that you still need to dig out.

■ To have your say on the forum visit:  
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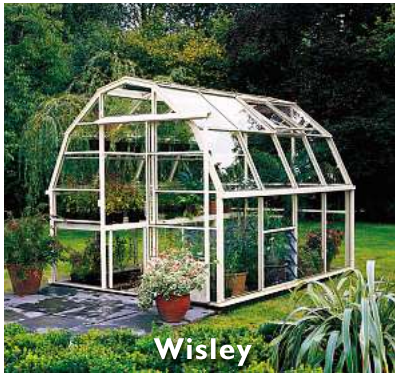


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# QUESTION TIME

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WITH

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KG EXPERTS & REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS TO RADIO 4'S GARDENERS' QUESTION TIME

## GETTING FRUIT FROM A STONE

If I have to buy fruit or vegetables and come across a new variety I haven't tried, if it is nice, I save and then plant the seeds/pips/stones. As a result I have many successful varieties of tomatoes each year but I also have baby trees in pots – plums, peaches, cherries and apricots (and have some figs to plant this spring). I know apples don't come true to type but will the stone fruit ever flower or fruit successfully? They are large enough to plant out and I don't mind a long wait, that's half the fun, but am I wasting my time and space?

*A M Bucket, Isle of White*

**BOB SAYS:** It's such fun, I do likewise. I find keeping seedling fruit trees in large tubs not only saves space but does bring them into fruit earlier than



planting out. I know most seedlings are not 'true' but I do find peaches and apricots quite close. Citrus seedlings can be multiple with some the usual hybrid and others actual clones of the parent. However, citrus are slow to fruit – 19 years for my lemon and 23 for my ortanique. Peaches are amazingly quick to crop, within

five years, and apricots not far behind. Cherries and plums take seven or eight years, apples, pears and cobnuts within a decade. I've never grown a fig from a pip so would be interested to hear how they do. And sometimes you do get something better – I have a pear that not only keeps but is still good eating till Easter.

★★★★★  
**STAR LETTER**  
WINS £25 VOUCHER  
★★★★★

## SHADY PLANTING

My neighbour has recently erected a fence along the side of my vegetable patch so that part of it is now in shade for most of the day. What vegetables will do best in these shady conditions and what should I avoid?

*Richard Marsh, Orpington*

**ANNE SAYS:** As the sun rises in the sky, you might be surprised how much extra light floods in during summer, but if the fence lies to the south or west of the bed, the border has become north or east facing. Unless it is abnormally windy, tall crops such

as runner and climbing French beans might do well. Try one of the self-pollinating runners like 'Firestorm' or a generally good doer like 'Red Rum'. I'd tend to avoid most roots, onions and squash but opt instead for leafy chard and spinach. Lettuce and parsley sometimes benefit from a little shade during high summer. For winter, Jerusalem artichokes will probably grow there, as they tend to do well anywhere. Gooseberries, blackcurrants and morello cherries thrive in shadier spots. From an April/May sowing, try tenderstem broccoli for autumn and a few winter brassicas, including kale and purple sprouting, just to see how well they do. Different choices will allow you to rotate the crops.



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## TIMBER FOR RAISED BEDS

Could you please help me. I want to build raised beds for veg but is it safe to use pressure treated timber or not? I've had some say 'yes' and some say 'no', so I don't know what to do.

*Richard Donne, Carmarthenshire*

**BOB SAYS:** It all depends on the chemicals used and on other factors. Simply lining the beds with plastic sheeting will isolate the wood from the soil and crops. However, any treated wood will still

eventually rot, then leach into the surrounding soil. Wooden sides also provide lots of niches for slugs, millipedes and similar pests, and on any large area are a considerable cost. Although more expensive initially, I recommend concrete slabs as these last forever. These are set on edge buried by at least a third, preferably half their height, and/or set in concrete as well to resist the pressure of the raised soil pushing them outwards when soaking wet. I dispense with fixed sides and simply make sloped sides and ends to my raised beds which are flat or even dish topped.

## ANTS IN ME PLANTS

My back garden is mainly vegetables and I have half an allotment literally over the back fence which comprises fruit bushes and trees. Last July was very hot and I was severely bitten by ants. My gardener will be coming to dig the garden over and I wondered if we sprayed it with Jeyes Fluid if it would assist?

*Margaret Smith, via e-mail*

**BOB SAYS:** On the whole I suspect ants are about equally helpful and troublesome to the gardener. However, if you wish to get rid of them you can try, but they will reappear within a short period as new colonies start from queens flying in to the now empty territory. I prefer, if deemed necessary, to get rid of them by destroying their nests. As I spot each one, I place empty tins upside down over it, several to each nest. Within a week or so the ants bring their 'eggs' (cocoons) up into those tins for the sun's warmth. Except when it is very cold, or



very hot, ants bring up cocoons in late morning and down again in late afternoon. Thus, in early to mid afternoon, you can slip a card under each tin and empty it into a bucket of water. The ants and cocoons float and can be poured off into a sieve for the bird table, hens or fish. Do this persistently several times and you weaken the colonies. Then, to finish a nest off, you slowly pour boiling water down the tunnel entrances – lots of it. Once cooled, it's best to dig and break up each nest physically so it can't be repaired and reused.

## MEADOW FRUIT

I have a meadow area in my garden to attract beneficial insects. It seems to work well and looks pretty, so I'm thinking of doing without the lawn and extending it. I was wondering if I could have my cake and eat it by planting a few small fruiting plants as well? If so, which kinds would you suggest I try? It's a sunny, sheltered site with heavyish alkaline soil. (I realise they won't do as well as ones planted in open ground.)

*Patsy Davies, Hampshire*



**ANNE SAYS:** In our small orchard of mature apples and plums, we allow long grass to grow right up to their trunks. However, on adding new trees, we've cut a generous circle in the grass first and maintained this weed free while the

young tree is establishing. Here, they also need to be protected from deer and rabbits, so they are fitted with guards and sprayed with a deterrent called Grazers. Apples and pears prefer a slightly acidic soil but will tolerate a wider range and are worth trying. Although you want small plants, bear in mind that the more dwarfing the stock, the less tolerant of adverse soil conditions the tree will be. If your space is really small, consider upright, staked, summer pruned cordons which you can buy ready-trained. Apples are generally easier and less fussy than pears. Plums like a slightly alkaline soil and you could try them on a Pixy rootstock, although on my clay soil they do better as larger trees. Soft fruit bushes are worth trying, though most prefer acidic to neutral soils. Try unusual honeyberry (a type of bushy honeysuckle).

## POLLINATION FRIEND OR FOE?

Is it okay to plant different sweetcorn varieties next to each other or could it cause some problems? For example, if I want to plant baby corn such as 'Snobaby' next to normal sized corn, could it cause a problem?

*Mr-Cecil, KG Forum*

**ANNE SAYS:** I know where you are coming from, because modern supersweet varieties such as 'Mirai Gold' should not be grown with other kinds of sweetcorn. The reason for this is that cross-pollination can result in starchy instead of sweet kernels in both varieties. However, you don't need to isolate tendersweet kinds like 'Lark' or sugar-enhanced varieties like 'Bodacious'. As sweetcorn is wind-pollinated, isolation is tricky but solvable by planting only one variety, or sowing early and late so pollination is staggered. 'Snobaby' is a mini corn and as the kernels are not going to develop, pollination is not required. If you did decide to grow a supersweet variety alongside, you could remove the mini corn flower tassels.

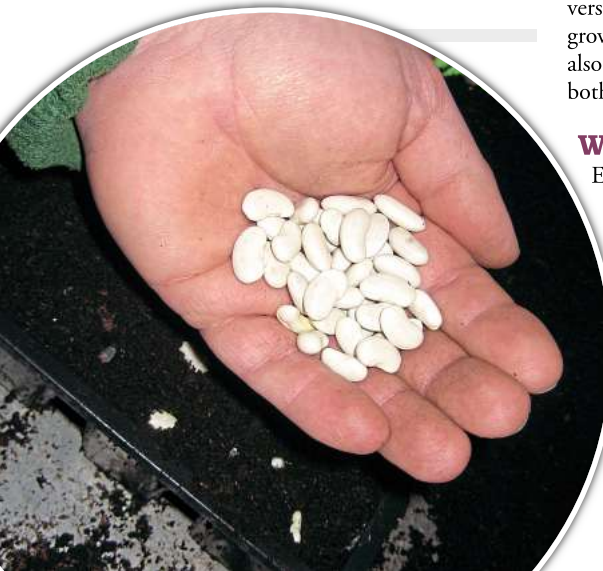




## KG BEGINNER'S GUIDE

# Climbing French Beans

Reliable and tasty, the French climbing bean deserves a place in any vegetable garden. Veg expert **Andrew Tokely** explains how to produce the perfect crop



**J**ust like its short bean cousins, the climbing bean is easy to grow and guaranteed to produce a crop of tasty, succulent beans. Unlike runner beans, however, climbing French beans are self fertile so their pods are set without the need for insects to pollinate them. This makes them a far more versatile crop for gardeners. The majority are grown outdoors in the summer, but they can also be grown undercover, thereby extending both ends of the cropping season.

## WHEN TO SOW

Early sowings can be made in a frost free greenhouse or polytunnel from mid February to early March. These can be raised in cell trays and then transplanted into large containers or the greenhouse border for an early crop. Further sowings can be made undercover into cell trays or pots in mid April, grown on and gradually hardened off to plant out in mid May. As these beans are not frost hardy they should not be sown directly

outdoors into the plot until the soil has warmed up in late April to early May.

For outdoor sowings it's best to sow a first batch during the last week of April, followed by another in the middle of May, and a third and final batch in mid June. If the spring is cold and wet, wait – beans do not like germinating in cold soils. In late summer (late July to late August) a sowing can be made in containers outdoors and then moved undercover once the weather gets cooler so as to extend the growing season.

## SOWING METHODS

For sowings that are made in pots or cell trays, it is important to use a free-draining compost, such as a soil-less multi-purpose one mixed 50/50 with perlite. Sow two or three seeds per pot or cell, pushing them into the compost so they are just under the surface. Once sown, water the compost so it is just moist (rather than wet) to avoid rotting. Place the pots or cell trays in a warm greenhouse with a minimum temperature of 10-13°C (50-55°F) where they will start to germinate in 14-21 days.



## CLIMBING FRENCH BEANS AT A GLANCE

Sow seed	Harvest
Jan	
Feb	
Mar	
Apr	
May	
June	
Jul	
Aug	
Sept	
Oct	
Nov	
Dec	

## TOP TIP

Beans that have been raised in pots or trays should be gradually hardened off in a cold frame for a few weeks before planting out once all risk of frost has passed



Emerging plants will need attaching to bamboo canes

## PLANTING IN CONTAINERS

Climbing French beans grow very well in containers on a sunny patio. The containers should be no smaller than 60cm (24in) in diameter with an obelisk or wigwam of 1.8-2.1m (6-7ft) tall canes placed in the middle for support. Try planting different varieties together in a container to produce different flower and pod colours, thereby creating a decorative patio feature. These containers are best filled with a mix of John Innes No 3 compost 50/50 with a multi-purpose soil-less compost. This mix gives the containers a little extra stability as the plants grow, but won't be too heavy if they need moving around the patio display.

All containers will require regular watering every evening once established and at the top of the canes. Feeding with a high potash tomato food once a week after the first beans have set will help to prolong the bean harvest. Extend the growing season by sowing a container in the corner of the greenhouse in February for an early picking and late summer outdoors, moving inside once the days get cooler for a later harvest.



For outside growing, sow into drills approximately 5-7cm (2-3in) deep, spacing a cluster of two or three beans along the drill 15-20cm (6-8in) apart and the rows 60cm (24in) apart. Once sown, rake the soil back over the drill and gently firm with the back of a rake. Once the seedlings germinate and are 10-15cm (4-6in) tall, put some cane supports into the ground for them to climb up. If planting out of cell trays or pots, erect the supports first and plant up against the canes.

**“KEEP THE BEANS WELL WATERED WHILE THE FLOWERS ARE DEVELOPING”**

## GROUND PREPARATION AND GENERAL CARE

In the autumn dig over your plot and incorporate a good quantity of organic matter. This helps to retain moisture in the soil, which is very important for healthy beans. In the spring rake down the surface to a fine tilth and add some

Growmore fertiliser at 60gm sq m (2oz per yard) before drawing out drills for sowing, or transplanting out bean plants. Insert cane supports 1.8-2.1m (6-7ft) tall into the soil and tie to a cross bar for stability to enable the varieties to climb.

During the summer it is important to keep the beans well watered while the flowers are developing and the bean pods are swelling. Without water the beans will not develop properly and will quickly get old and tough. Best to water along the rows in the evening as this

gives them time to absorb the water overnight. Keep the plants clean from weeds as they grow, by hoeing regularly.

## PEST AND DISEASES

Blackfly may attack young tender growing tips but can be controlled by spraying with a suitable insecticide at the first sign of the pest.

During very hot weather, red spider mites can turn the leaves silvery and make small spider webs in between the leaves. This again can be controlled using a suitable insecticide or, if you ➤





Climbing French beans produce succulent pods

spray water over the foliage in the evenings during hot weather, this can also discourage them as this pest does not like wet or humid conditions.

Slugs and snails can occasionally nibble young seedlings; these can be controlled by using whichever slug deterrent you like that works in your garden.

If the weather is very wet and humid, beans can sometimes be affected by the bacterial disease halo blight. This makes brown damp patches on the foliage surrounded by a yellow halo. Halo blight can be controlled by spraying with a suitable fungicide if caught early enough; otherwise, the crop should be destroyed to avoid it spreading to other bean crops.

Very rarely beans are affected by common bean mosaic virus as most varieties available these days show some resistance, but if your crop were unlucky enough to be affected, there is no cure and plants should be destroyed.

## HARVESTING

Beans are always best harvested when they are young and tender for the best flavour as old pods will quickly become tough and useless to eat. Depending on sowing times and if growing undercover as well as outside, it is possible to be picking beans from June to October. I always think French beans freeze better than runner beans, retaining their flavour, so any surplus can be stored away for meals later in the year. ■

## ANDREW'S PICK OF THE VARIETIES



■ **'BLAUHILDE'** – Delicious purple podded variety producing 27cm (11in) long, stringless, tender pods. Can be picked from July through to October. (Thompson & Morgan)



■ **'COBRA'** – A heavy cropping variety with 18cm (7in) long beans of exceptional flavour. Very decorative with a mauve flower. RHS AGM Winner. (Widely available)



■ **'HUNTER'** – A very bright green, flat podded, stringless bean ideal for forcing under glass or growing outside. A heavy cropper. (Widely available)



■ **'CORONA D'ORO'** – Golden yellow, pencil podded beans with excellent flavour and virtually stringless. (Kings Seeds)



■ **'BARLOTTA LINGUA FUOCO'** – Attractive, flat pods splashed with red and cream spots which disappear on cooking. (The Organic Gardening Catalogue)



■ **'EVA'** – Very early variety producing dark green, oval pods up to 25cm (10in) long. Excellent flavour. (Kings Seeds, The Organic Gardening Catalogue)

**FULL  
DETAILS  
OF SEED  
SUPPLIERS  
PAGE 104**



**NEXT MONTH:** Sweetcorn



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# Grow the champagne of the vegetable world

Colin Randel visited Hargreaves Plants near King's Lynn in West Norfolk to see the world's largest asparagus trials and learn about asparagus growing



Viewing the asparagus trials grounds at Hargreaves

**F**resh British asparagus 'spears', the champagne of the vegetable world, are the first spring vegetables to be harvested and are as eagerly awaited as the first picking of peas, the first lifted root of earthy new potatoes and the first sun-kissed ripened tomatoes.

Asparagus is a long living perennial, performing best in an open, sunny situation with free-draining deep soil, as the roots will penetrate deeply. A raised bed on heavier soils will still need adequate drainage.

## PREPARE THE GROWING SITE

The bed should be dug over thoroughly to a depth of 60cm (2ft) if necessary, removing all perennial weeds and large stones, adding liberal quantities of well-rotted garden compost or stable manure. A bed 1.5m (5ft) wide will allow the planting of three rows with 45cm (18in) between the rows and approximately 25cm (10in) between the plants. If space is more limited, a bed 1m (3ft 3in) wide will accommodate two rows spaced as above.

On receipt of your one year crowns in spring (usually mid-March to early May) or first year crowns in autumn (October and November), unpack them and immerse in a bucket of water to rehydrate them prior to planting. Prepare trenches along the proposed line of planting

allowing sufficient width to fan out the roots, with the base being 15cm (6in) below the original ground level. Lay the moist crowns in the trench at the suggested spacings and carefully cover with soil so the crowns are covered by a maximum 15cm (6in) of soil. This depth must be maintained – the crowns will slowly grow higher in the soil year on year. Add a mulch of rotted compost, leafmould or stable manure each November when the fern (leaves) have yellowed and are cut down to just above soil level.

Professional growers will use a NPK 5-10-10 fertiliser for the first three years, then a 5-5-10 after that, but in our gardens a high potash feed (such as a tomato or rose food) will produce great results.

Gardeners should grow their asparagus on the flat for yields and longevity. Commercially they are grown on a ridge to allow mechanisation.

## ASPARAGUS IN CONTAINERS

Gardeners with limited space can grow asparagus intensively in a 60-litre patio tub in a sunny garden or on the patio – three crowns per tub, but longevity is not likely to be more than five years.





The crowns are planted splaying the roots out



Newly planted asparagus is encouraged just to grow plenty of fern and is not harvested initially



Make the rows deep and wide enough to take the crowns without restricting the roots



Only when crowns have been in for three years do you start to harvest for a couple of weeks

Gardeners must also always hand weed their bed; no hoeing, as the myriad fine asparagus roots are easily damaged.

Historically a well-tended bed could last more than 20 years but yield potential will lessen before then. Commercial bed expectancy is 10 to 12 years, and for growers who intensively harvest at high plant density it is only five years. The main pitfalls with asparagus are 'weed and greed' – weeds which are a killer until the crowns are established and gardeners pushing the boundaries of harvesting too many spears over too long a period.

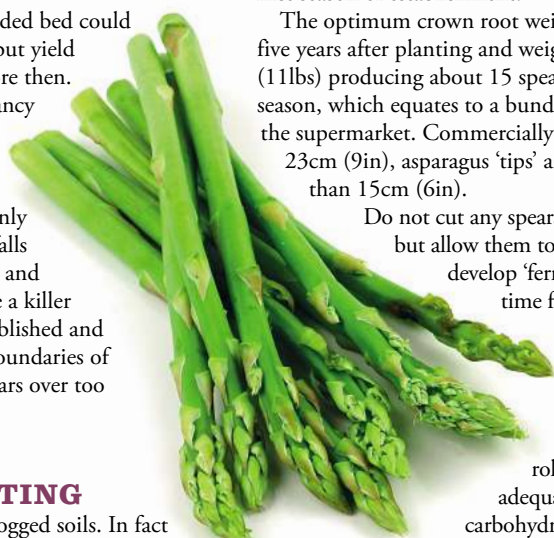
## GROWING ON AND HARVESTING

Asparagus detests waterlogged soils. In fact it is drought tolerant, probably the most

drought-tolerant vegetable worldwide, but it is advisable to keep the plants watered during the first season of establishment.

The optimum crown root weight is reached five years after planting and weighs up to 5kg (11lbs) producing about 15 spears (250g) per season, which equates to a bundle purchased in the supermarket. Commercially spears are cut at 23cm (9in), asparagus 'tips' are no longer than 15cm (6in).

Do not cut any spears the first season but allow them to grow and develop 'fern'. This allows time for the plant to grow and increase its root system which in turn plays a vital role in storing adequate levels of carbohydrates, the fuel needed to produce the ➤



## COLOURS OF ASPARAGUS

### WHITE

Virtually all Europe enjoys white spears, but not the UK. Crowns are planted deeper as the entire spear is produced under the soil. The soil surface 'cracks' as the spear begins to emerge. More laborious, since one has to delve deep into the soil to harvest and the spears are more difficult to prepare and need peeling. Different taste and nutritional values.

### GREEN

These come in two categories. In the UK we prefer green asparagus with purple tips and bracts (see varieties page 28). The continental green spears have no purple anthocyanin at all and their tips and bracts are an insipid creamy yellow and not visually appealing. These specific varieties are not grown in the UK.

### PURPLE

These tend to be lower yielding but produce a stunning purple spear. Very sweet taste and ideally eaten raw in salads or dips as the anthocyanin is water soluble and you're left with a dark green spear. Ensure you use the water in a soup or gravy and do not tip it down the sink.

## ASPARAGUS LUNCH

When Colin visited Hargreaves to view the asparagus trials, lunch was served, obviously with an asparagus theme. On the menu was asparagus (variety 'Mondeo') guacamole with pitta chips followed by chicken breast with asparagus (variety 'Guelph Millennium') mousseline served with tossed leaves in vinaigrette.

And for dessert, asparagus panacotta (variety 'Purple Pacific').





## VARIETIES TO TRY

Hargreaves Plants offers many varieties to the trade and its trials, which include selections from 14 breeding programmes worldwide, will be used to introduce the next generation of varieties. These will have better disease resistance, longevity, flavour, yield of class one spears, spear diameter and straightness, head quality and colour. Here are some current favourites:



'Gijnlim', widely grown in the UK

■ **'GIJNLIM'**: Used on the Continent as white asparagus but widely grown by gardeners in the UK as a green asparagus. It has a Royal Horticultural Society Award of Garden Merit. (Pomona Fruits, Marshalls).

■ **'ARIANE'**: Mid season with attractive spears. (D T Brown, Marshalls, T&M).

■ **'MONDEO'**: Early German-bred asparagus, stronger flavour to spears. (Mr Fothergill's, Suttons, Pomona Fruits, T&M).

■ **'PACIFIC 2000'**: Bred in New Zealand. Early, with a sweet flavour. (T&M).

■ **'PACIFIC CHALLENGER'**: Early, has phytophthora disease resistance. Waterlogged or very wet soils increase this problem. (T&M)

■ **'PURPLE PACIFIC'**: Bred in New Zealand, world-leading purple, very sweet and tender spears. (Ken Muir, T&M, Mr Fothergill's, Marshalls).

■ **'STEWART'S PURPLE'**: A more recent introduction from New Zealand, awarded an RHS AGM in 2012. (Suttons, Pomona Fruits).



'Purple Pacific', a very sweet and tender variety

■ **'GUELPH MILLENNIUM'**: This cultivar is from the world's most northerly breeding programme at the University of Guelph in Canada and so its cold winter tolerance is superb. Its 'lateness' is important to avoid frosts which can harm early-produced spears. Excellent spear quality and flavour. (T&M, Suttons).

■ **'AMARO MONTINA'**: This is a new introduction for 2014 of 'wild' type asparagus from Italy. This is an improvement on 'Wild Amarus', which T&M successfully launched to gardeners in 2007, producing lots of slender, dark green spears of strong flavour for a range of culinary dishes. (Organic Gardening Catalogue, D T Brown, Ken Muir).

harvestable spears in future years.

Commercial growers will harvest for two weeks the year after planting, but gardeners are strongly advised to be patient for a further year (year three) before being tempted to a two-week harvest. In year four onwards, spears can be cut over an eight-week period. Harvesting beyond midsummer will shorten the life of the bed as after harvesting is completed the spears grow into 'fern' which produces the food and nutrients necessary for a healthy and productive crop the following season.

Plant more than a single variety if you want regular cutting and extending the season. Spears are best cut cleanly at ground level so the remnant does not try to continue to produce another spear that year. Do not delve into the soil as you can damage adjoining spears and roots.

## BREEDING 'MALE HYBRIDS'

Since the mid-1970s breeding developments have introduced 'male hybrids' (the widely used term 'all male' is slightly misleading as it does happen that an occasional female plant gets through the system). These have a number of advantages over female plants:

- Male plants live longer than female plants
- Male plants emerge earlier in the spring than female plants
- Male plants do not produce berries which compete with the crowns and roots for nutrients
- As male plants do not produce berries, they outyield female plants over time, increasingly apparent after the second or third year in production.
- Male plants have no seeds that can produce unwanted volunteer seedlings. ■

## PESTS & DISEASES

### ASPARAGUS BEETLES

Most gardeners encounter numbers of larvae and beetles in their asparagus bed; both feed on the foliage and bark from May through the summer. If only small numbers are present, squash with your fingers. If chemical sprays are required, a suitable insecticide will clear the problem; spray at dusk to avoid harming bees. Burn down the old stems at the end of the season to destroy overwintering beetles prior to mulching the crowns.



### PHYTOPHTHORA AND FUSARIUM

Asparagus is a relatively disease-free vegetable. The critical point is to prepare the planting bed thoroughly as deeply as possible in an open, sunny site. This will avoid the above mentioned diseases. Certainly do not grow in waterlogged or very wet soils or under the shade of trees or any shady area, as this reduces yields and increases the incidence of disease.



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# Carrots

## AT A GLANCE

A firm favourite on the veg plot and in the kitchen, so let's get growing



**SOW  
(OUTDOORS):**  
April-July  
**HARVEST:**  
June-October

**C**arrots are a must-have crop. Cooked or raw, they are a staple in the kitchen, bring a cheery brightness to any plate and, unlike some of those leafy greens, even kids like them. Although relatively easy to grow, they do require a fair degree of aftercare, especially in the early stages.

### **SOWING**

Carrots like a light, stone-free soil which hasn't been manured for at least 12 months. Add some general fertiliser and rake this before sowing. Make a V-shaped drill with a hoe or the corner of a rake to about 1cm (½in). Sprinkle seeds thinly along the trench and then cover them lightly. Rows should be about 15cm (6in) apart. Sow successively every couple of weeks to ensure a continuous supply.

### **GROWING**

Once the seedlings are large enough to handle, thin them out, leaving a gap of about 7cm (3in) between those that remain. It's best to do this in the evening when there are fewer carrot fly about, and watering the rows straight afterwards

will help cover up the smell. Remove your thinnings from the site.

### **LOOKING AFTER YOUR PLANTS**

Make sure you water your carrots thoroughly during very dry spells, but otherwise they don't need a lot of watering.

Although you can use the hoe to weed between rows, you will also need to hand weed immediately next to plants to avoid lopping off the carrot tops inadvertently. It is easy – especially with young seedlings – for carrots to be overwhelmed by faster-growing weeds.

### **TOP TIP**

Grow short-rooted varieties if your soil is stony or heavy clay

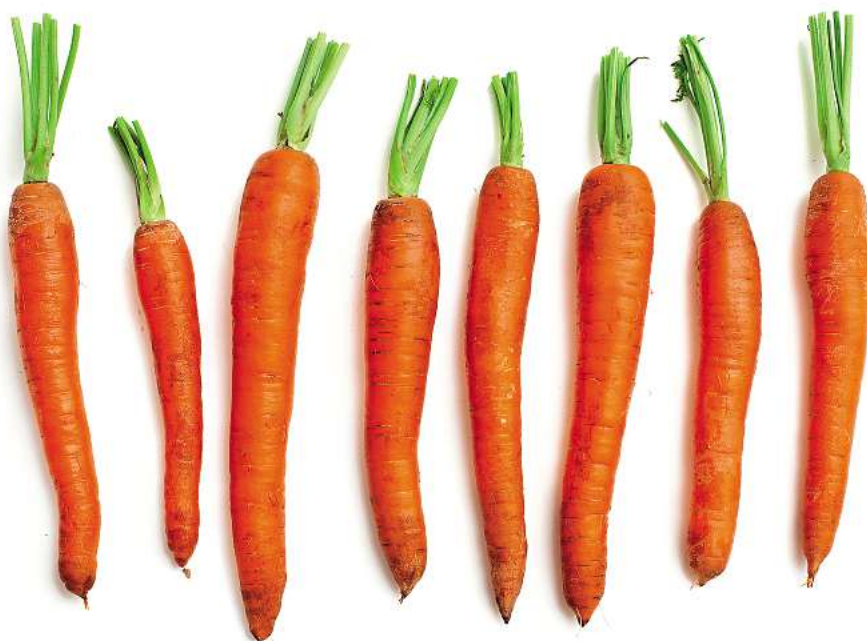
### **HARVESTING**

Lift your carrots from June onwards, depending on when they were sown. Best to ease them out rather than just pull them. If the soil is hard, loosen it up with a small fork so that you don't only pull up half a carrot. Carrots lifted in October can be stored until as far on as March. First cut off the foliage to about 1cm (½in) above the top and then place in layers of sand in a wooden box in a dry place such as a shed. Make sure the carrots aren't touching each other.



## CARROTS IN CONTAINERS

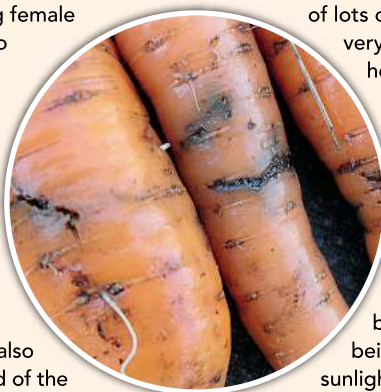
Carrots can be sown under cover as early as February in pots or containers, which should be at least 25cm (10in) deep. These can then be moved outside later when the weather is warmer. Use multi-purpose compost, sow thinly and cover lightly with compost. Thin them out if necessary and, once the seedlings are 10cm (4in) tall, they will need regular watering and will benefit from a high potash (tomato) feed every couple of weeks.



## WHAT'S GONE WRONG?

■ **CARROT FLY:** The low-flying female lays her eggs in the soil next to carrots and when these hatch, the larvae burrow into the carrot roots. You can buy resistant varieties but a traditional method is to surround your carrots with a 60cm (2ft) high insect netting or polythene barrier, or cover them with a protective fleece.

■ **FORKING:** 'Fanging' as it is also sometimes called is not the end of the world as forked carrots are perfectly edible, but it's not really what you're looking for. Carrots will fork in stony soil or soil that has manure less than 12 months old.



■ **SPLIT CARROTS:** This is a result of lots of watering after a very dry spell, or after heavy rain. Make sure you water through a drought rather than after one.

■ **GREEN TOP:** If the crowns of your carrots look a little green it's because they're being exposed to sunlight. This is easily remedied by earthing up around the carrots so that the crowns are covered.

ABOVE: Carrot fly damage is easy to identify

## VARIETIES TO TRY

■ **'AMSTERDAM FORCING 3':** This is one of the earliest varieties and good for pots, tubs, raised beds or under cloches. The roots are orange, cylindrical and round at the end. A good variety for freezing.

■ **'FLYAWAY' F1 HYBRID:** A carrot fly-resistant variety, the roots are smooth, broad shouldered and blunt ended.

■ **'PARMEX':** This variety is good for containers and, because they are small and round, do better in clay soils than their long-rooted counterparts.

■ **'PURPLE SUN' F1 HYBRID:** A purple variety (inside and out) with long, tapering roots, good for juicing.

■ **'ESKIMO':** A cold tolerant variety, this produces orange, cylindrical roots and can be left in the ground over winter, tolerating -10°C (14°F).



'Parmex' is good for stony or heavy soils

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# TRIED & TASTED pea shoots



This month our intrepid veg expert **Joe Maiden** looks at a fast and easy way to get the fresh taste of home-grown peas – all year round

**W**hen writing up my trials, my mind often drifts back to my youth and my father's garden in Cumbria. For example, his concern when sowing peas was how to get good germination; how many seeds would the mice take, how many would the jackdaws or pigeons take and how many would rot in his soil? Dad's remedy for all his worries was to sow his peas very thickly.

One day I remember standing with him at the allotment and finding that every pea had germinated. He decided we should thin them out and we went along the rows leaving only the strongest seedlings an inch apart. As I was doing this dad was gathering the thinnings carefully in his hands.

Job done he took me down to the tap on the allotment and with his sharp knife cut off the roots, washed the shoots under the tap and we sat down on the bench and chewed away at the young succulent shoots, tendrils just forming. What a sweet tasty snack; I can still remember the taste vividly.

Pea shoots are now readily available in supermarkets and embraced as a 'modern' way of healthy eating. I have always grown peas on as pea shoots and if there are some leftover seeds I normally sow these in pots to put in salads.

The other night I put some in a pan of boiling water, left them for two minutes until they were a lovely light green colour, then took them out of the water, added a little sugar,

butter, salt and pepper. Served with some freshly cooked salmon, they made a wonderful meal.

It is so easy to grow a succession of pea shoots, so on November 1 I decided to sow seven different varieties in pots in the cold greenhouse to see if it would be possible to grow a crop throughout



'Sugar Ann' produced rapid growth





Pea shoots are the perfect windowsill crop



Pea 'Onward' grown in cell trays for shoots

the winter. 'Windowsill gardening' can produce results that are edible in just four weeks and although I was using a cold greenhouse instead, my idea was to build up a system of growing where I would sow and germinate on a regular basis. I decided that I would see how things went, and if needed would bring a batch indoors and on to a windowsill in a warm room before eating.

The selection chosen consisted of varieties left over in my seed box at the end of the season to see which responded to this way of growing. I wanted to see how they'd perform growth-wise in the poor winter conditions, but was also looking for any differences in flavour, texture and so on.

Of course, my successional cropping would be boosted by the arrival of spring, bringing improved light intensity and making it easier to sow the right amount for continuity.

When sowing peas in the garden I often sow in module trays, putting six seeds in each large cell. One of my favourite varieties is 'Onward', which we have eaten as a pea shoots many times. I also decided to see if a handful of peas from my wife Betty's dried pea jar in the kitchen – an unknown variety sold in the supermarket for adding to stews and so on – would give any results – if you don't try you will never know.

My method was to use a 13cm (5in) pot filled to the top with multi-purpose compost, the peas sown thickly so they are almost touching. When sowing was completed, the seed was pressed down into the compost and covered with 6mm (¼in) of compost to bed them in.

I have learned in the past that it is a good idea not to overwater as this can result in rotting the seed.

This trial was conducted during the depths of winter when the light intensity was very poor, yet I was able to produce good results. My great thrill was to see Betty's dried peas out of the pantry perform so well with lovely tendrils after five weeks in wintertime.

This is another wonderful way to encourage children to grow plants and enjoy gardening, so get them growing pea shoots. ►



Joe sows his peas on top of a 13cm (5in) pot and lightly covers with compost

## VARIETIES USED

■ **'METEOR'** (widely available)

■ **'WAVEX'** (petit pois)

Kings, Victoriana Nursery

■ **'DOUCE PROVENCE'** (widely available)

■ **'HALF PINT'** (Kings, Seeds of Distinction)

■ **'TWINKLE'** (widely available)

■ **'SUGAR ANN'** (sugar pea) T&M, Sarah Raven

■ **STEEPING PEAS** – dried peas from the supermarket

■ **'ONWARD'** – Since I have grown this in the past and know how it performs, this was my control. (widely available)



Joe simply selected varieties he found in his seed box at the end of the year. 'Pie & Peas' above was the name given to Betty's dried supermarket steeping peas

VARIETY	SPEED OF GROWTH (OUT OF 10)	SWEETNESS (OUT OF 10)	ROTTING OFF (NO PLANTS)	GERMINATION (DAYS)
'Meteor'	8	8	0	11
'Wavex'	7	8	0	13
'Douce Provence'	8	7	7	10
'Half Pint'	7	7	0	11
'Twinkle'	7	9	8	10
'Sugar Ann'	10	9	0	10
'Onward' (Control)	9	8	0	12
Steeping peas (unknown variety)	10	7	0	10

**JOE'S  
CHOICE  
FOR PEA  
SHOOTS**





Lettuce are just made for pots



Brassicas such as 'Red Russian' kale are tasty when young and tender

## OTHER SIMPLE EDIBLE VARIETIES FOR YEAR-ROUND CROPPING

As the season turns to autumn I like to use up any leftover summer lettuce seeds but, of course, seeds for salad leaves can be sown all year round. After sowing thinly on to the surface of the compost in 13cm (5in) pots and trays, they are left in the cold greenhouse on the bench. This year in November I sowed the variety 'Little Gem' to see how long I could pick fresh leaves and, as it turned out, they were still producing tender leaves at Christmas.

These pots can be moved indoors to a windowsill for easy picking once established and we use them to go with the cold meat left over from the Sunday joint. Fresh home-grown leaves make that cold meat sandwich extra special.

Another early edible to grow when onion sets are available is spring onions. Just plant the sets close together so they are almost touching and as soon as they have made 7.5cm (3in) of green growth you can remove them from the pots, take off the withered brown coat over the bulb and underneath you will have a perfectly white blanched stem, the easiest and quickest spring onion you have ever grown. From seeds, onions can take four months to reach harvestable size, but just four weeks from sets. Similarly you can try some garlic cloves planted close together in pots. Pull these after a few weeks to provide beautiful young garlic. Take off the papery shell and you

can eat the bulb, stem and leaf. It has a milder taste than mature bulbs.

Some of my favourite leaves through the winter are baby leaf brassicas. I sow a small batch of brassica seeds – cabbage, kale, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts in little pots and as these grow on they are transferred into larger pots. As the leaves get big enough to eat we pick them young for special meals – so tender and sweet, and these have been growing in a cold greenhouse! So if you have a greenhouse or polytunnel that's not being used for anything during the winter months give it a go.

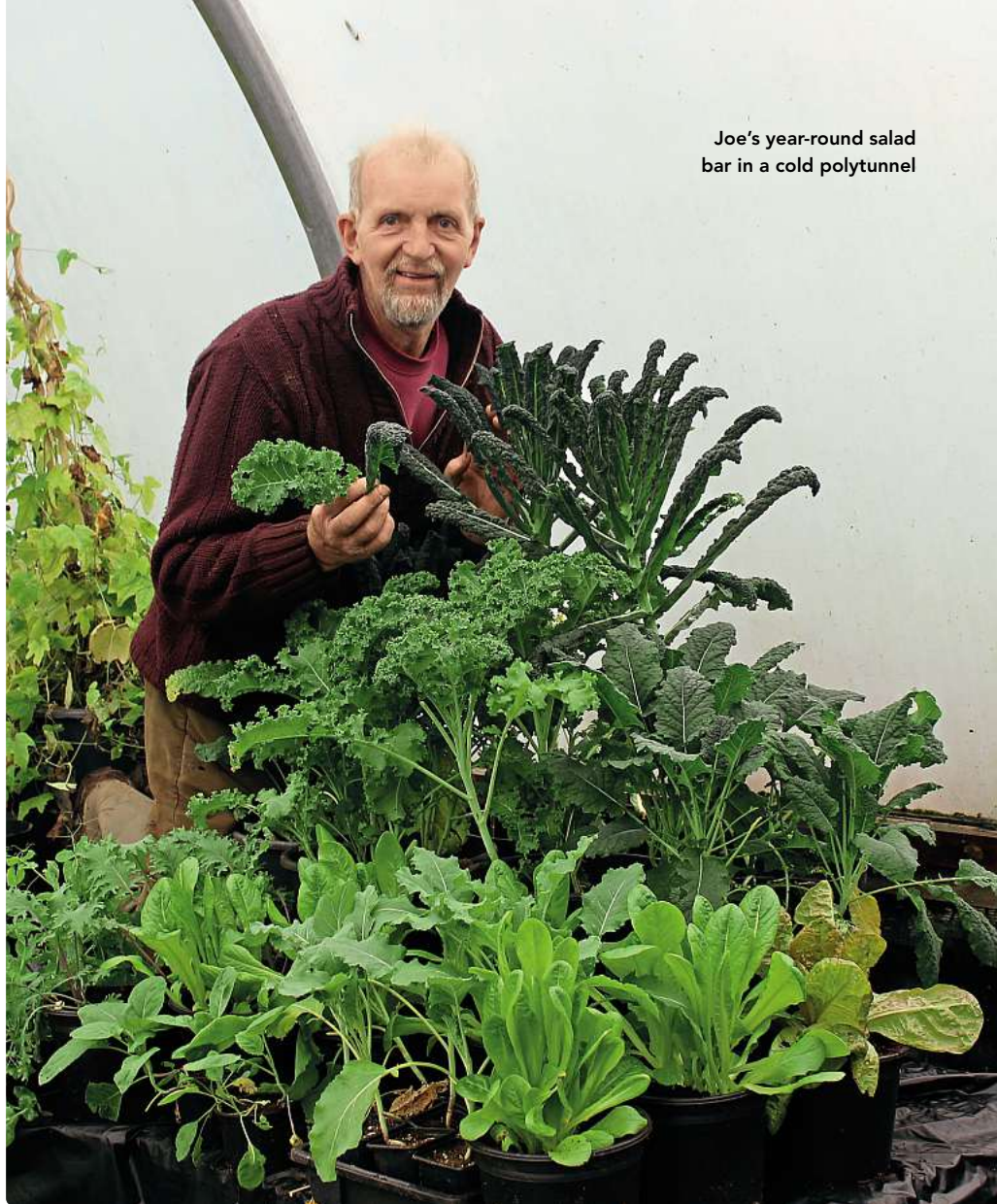
Try tender young brassica crops such as spring cabbage 'Durham Early' and kale 'Dwarf Green Curled'. My favourite is kale 'Redbor' with its wonderful red colour. Or how about kale 'Red Russian', with its flat, tender leaves?

Kale 'Cavolo De Nero', often called 'the black cabbage', is my choice for baby leaf, sown in my cold greenhouse mid-August and grown in a polytunnel during its life for the production of tender, raw greens or stir-fry ingredients.

Use small pots, sowing eight or nine seeds into each. Just allow them to grow on as already mentioned and when large enough use in salads and sandwiches, or just cook and season for a few moments for a special meal – you cannot buy baby fresh leaves like these. ■

**NEXT MONTH:** Unusual veg tried and tasted

Joe's year-round salad bar in a cold polytunnel



Onion sets packed into pots **INSET:** they can be harvested after four weeks as spring onions



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# Topsy turvy tomatoes



When it comes to growing tomatoes it can pay to look beyond the ordinary. **Benedict Vanheems** explores some less-common methods to raising our summer favourite

**F**or many kitchen gardeners it's the tried-and-tested growing bag that plays host to our annual crop of tasty tomatoes. It's no surprise we've come to love these handy parcels of goodness. Introduced in the early 1970s, the humble growing bag is tailor-made for tomatoes and other fruiting vegetables, offering convenience and flexibility.

That said there is no reason why the experimental gardener shouldn't think outside the box, or rather bag. The versatile tomato is available in miniature, bush and vine forms – and the potential ways of growing them are just as varied. Here then are a few methods to consider as you nurture your seedlings ready for planting out at the end of May.

## A RANGE OF TOMATO PLANT CONTAINERS



Try toms in a hessian sack...



...grow them in coir pots...



...even in an old bath!



Recycled crates work well, too





Growing tomatoes upside down has a number of advantages, one of which is that the roots get a good drenching



Growing tomatoes in straw has certain advantages. As it breaks down it releases heat giving the plants an excellent start



As the season progresses, the roots of the tomato plants take full advantage of the nutrients released by the rotting straw

## UPSIDE-DOWN

One of my most successful years for tomatoes was when I grew some grafted plants in plain-old window boxes. But rather than train them up bamboo canes, I placed the boxes on upstairs windowsills and left the plants to trail downwards. This way they got to enjoy the south-facing brick wall beneath the window frames, soaking up the extra heat released from the walls at night-time. The result was a glut of tomatoes that kept on coming. The elevated and somewhat isolated position also meant that pests such as whitefly didn't get a look in.

You can repeat this trick quite easily. Grafted tomatoes are worth the investment as they offer consistently reliable results (I didn't even bother pinching mine out – they just got on with it). The plants are so reliable because the variety grown is grafted on to a root stock that gives exceptional vigour to the plant, helping it to shake off potential setbacks and put on good growth, even during poor summers. Window boxes need to be properly secured to their window ledge – particularly on upstairs windows – to prevent them from getting caught by the wind or simply sliding off because they've become top-heavy.

A number of 'upside-down' planters are now available that give similar growing conditions, for example the Topsy Turvy Tomato Planter (£4.99 from [www.iwantoneofthose.com](http://www.iwantoneofthose.com)). The tomato plant is fed through the bottom of the planter so it dangles downwards, and then compost is filled to the top of the planter before hanging it up on to a sturdy bracket. Because the roots are in effect facing upwards, when watering

with this method there is the advantage of delivering what's needed straight to the roots, minimising waste and runoff.

You can make your own upside down planter very easily using a recycled five-gallon bucket – the type you bulk buy chicken manure pellets and other organic fertilisers in. Drill a 5cm (2in) hole into the centre of the base of the bucket then plant as above, filling in around the root ball with compost and up to the top. Hang the bucket up by the handle in full sunshine, then water and apply liquid feed from above. You can plant the top of the bucket up with companion plants such as basil or whitefly-repelling French marigolds. Alternatively, replace the lid of the bucket between waterings to keep the root zone cool and slow down evaporation (white lids are best as they reflect the sun's heat – and conveniently most lids of these types of buckets are indeed white).

## STRAW THING

If you are fortunate enough to live in the countryside or have ready access to a cost-effective supply of straw bales, then you may want to try the traditional method of growing your tomatoes in straw. As the straw bale rots down it releases heat, which can have a hugely positive effect at the start of the season when the weather is still relatively cool. That extra heat could make all the difference between a bumper crop and a few snatched fruits at the end of the growing season.

Start by covering the ground with a plastic sheet then lay your straw bales on top. To kick-start decomposition thoroughly wet the bales with a high-nitrogen fertiliser. Compost activator ➤

## TRIED & TRUSTED

■ **HANGING BASKETS:** Great for small tomato plants, such as the cherry types. Water regularly to stop them drying out in the sun and wind. Add moisture-retaining gel to the compost to help bridge the gap between waterings.



■ **POTS AND TUBS:** Tubs offer flexibility. Many planters sold for tomatoes, such as the Quadgrow, are self-watering. Mix soil-based compost into your multipurpose compost to help it retain moisture.



■ **IN THE GROUND:** Many gardeners swear by good-old soil-grown tomatoes for the best taste. Include tomatoes in a crop rotation with potatoes to avoid exhausting the soil.







Doubling-up your growing bags and adding a bottomless pot gives you treble the compost

works well or, even better, use nature's activator (fresh urine) applied discreetly or poured on having been 'decanted' indoors. The bales will generate a lot of heat as they start rotting, slumping down and compacting in the process.

The cue for planting is when the temperature of the rotting bales begins to drop. Use a soil thermometer to check this. Top off the bales with a thick layer of multipurpose compost, or create planting pockets filled with compost. Plant up with your tomatoes and other vegetables into the compost. As the season progresses the roots will work their way out into the rotting bales, taking full advantage of the nutrients contained within them. Once the growing season is over simply transfer what's left of the bales to the compost heap.

One word of caution is required here; many cereal crops are treated with herbicides to kill off broadleaved arable weeds. Herbicide residues may still persist within the bales, which in turn will harm your tomatoes. Be careful where you source your straw bales from and, if in doubt, ask about past treatments. Straw from organic growers will give ultimate peace of mind.

## WET, WET, WET

The vast majority of tomatoes sold in supermarkets are grown hydroponically, whereby all of the nutrients the plants need is supplied dissolved within the irrigation water. Hydroponics allows plants to be grown completely independently of soil or compost. The advantage to the kitchen gardener is the ability to grow tomatoes in tight spaces and with very little waste. It's also a lot of fun for the scientifically inclined enthusiast.

You can buy any number of ready-to-go hydroponics systems complete with ready-to-mix nutrient solutions. Examples include the indoor AeroGarden kits, which include an integral light so you can grow plants year-round. There's an initial capital outlay to any of these systems but once you've got it all up and running the ongoing cost is minimal.

Home-made versions can be made using horticultural vermiculite, perlite, clay pebbles or rockwool (which is used commercially) as the growing medium. Tomato seedlings need to be started off in the same growing medium using a very dilute nutrient solution right from the beginning.

## MAXIMUM IMPACT

If you've had disappointing results from growing bags in the past it could be down to cramming too many plants into one bag or the bag itself not being up to the job. Tomatoes need plenty of space for their roots to grow. The cheap growing bags often sold at DIY stores may simply not contain enough compost to offer adequate support – you really do get what you pay for.

The solution is to double-up your growing bags to double the volume of compost. Do this by stacking two bags on top of each other having first opened up the top of the bottom bag and scored several slits along the bottom of the top bag. The married up bags can be securely fastened together with string or gaffer tape.

Go one step further by pushing down a bottomless pot into each planting position and filling the pot half to two-thirds full with compost. The space at the top of the pot serves as a reservoir for you to water into, while the fact that the pot is part-buried into the compost of the growing bag ensures that moisture drains down into it with none of that irritating runoff. The extra compost also encourages more anchoring, nutrient-seeking roots, giving happier and healthier plants. Purchased 'tomato plant halos' work on a similar principle.

Any one of these methods can yield satisfying results, rewarding your ingenuity with bigger, brighter, better tomatoes. With the promise of plenty of luscious toms to come, it's a wise gardener who thinks outside the growing bag. ■



Hydroponic systems such as this AeroGarden kit allow you to grow tomatoes all year round

## 5 GOLDEN RULES FOR GROWING TOMATOES

- Feed regularly with a fertiliser high in potash. Scrimp and you'll pick fewer tomatoes with an insipid flavour.
- Plant tomatoes slightly deeper than their nursery pot to encourage more anchoring roots to grow from the bottom of the stem.
- Encourage predatory insects such as hoverflies and ladybirds into the garden to keep a check on insect pests.
- Provide adequate supports so that plants can concentrate on flowering and fruiting.
- Always pick the sunniest, warmest part of the garden for outdoor tomatoes – against a south-facing wall is best.



With hydroponics you dispense with soil and compost and rely on water only

## USEFUL CONTACTS

- **AEROGARDEN:** 0845 1707555, [www.aerogarden.org.uk](http://www.aerogarden.org.uk)
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# Moveable feasts

In a spin with crop rotation? Here is our simple guide which aims to take the mystery out of a process which, at first sight, can seem a little complicated

**C**rop rotation has been around for a long time, suggesting that it is a very useful technique to help you grow healthy harvests. Yet you'll all know gardeners who have never seriously attempted it and whose fruit and veg always grows perfectly – maybe that's you. True, it is more important in some circumstances than others, as we explain below, but as you'll also see, there are some very good reasons for trying it. So what is it?

Quite simply, crop rotation is the process of moving crops around your patch each year based on their family relationship or their cultivation needs, but why do it?

## IS CROP ROTATION ESSENTIAL?

Despite the many benefits of crop rotation, as we said at the outset, it is probably more important for some gardeners and types of garden. For example, if you grow on a little veg patch in the back garden, freshly dug from an area of lawn, the chances of the soil containing diseases to affect your crop are pretty slim, at least initially.

## WHY ROTATE YOUR CROPS?

- Keeping related crops together and moving them to a different patch of soil each year helps to avoid the build-up of pests and diseases which have adapted to feed on them.
- Each crop has its own needs with regard to nutrients. Rotating the land on which they grow helps to avoid any one area from becoming depleted of those nutrients.
- Crop rotation can also have an effect on the weed population; potatoes, for example, are good at helping clear the land of weeds thanks to their leaf cover and the soil disturbance involved in growing them. Moving them around the patch can help clean the soil, section by section.

- Rotation allows you to take an area out of cultivation if it needs some TLC; for example, to add lime (something which may not suit all crops) or to grow a green manure.
- It can be a great aid to planning – by splitting the crops into groups, rotation allows you to see the wood for the trees when it comes to deciding what to grow where.

**Onion white rot is just one devastating soil-borne disease that rotation can help defeat.**

Picture: Dave Bevan







Can you take it for granted that your harvests will always be good without crop rotation?



Grow potatoes and lettuce in the same spot year after year and the slugs will surely follow



If however, you grow your veg on an allotment which has been producing a typical range of veg for many years – over 100 years in many cases – and with other gardeners doing the self same thing, the chances of infection are high. Soil will inevitably be carried around the site on boots, plants and tools – the chances are pretty good that a problem such as brassica club root or onion white rot will emerge on site somewhere. Crop rotation then suddenly becomes much more important.

### MAKING COMPROMISES

The advice below assumes that you will only be growing one crop per year in each parcel of soil. However, that is often not the case in our modern space-strapped gardens. If you want to get the most from your soil, you may be intercropping – growing a slow crop such as parsnips or leeks with catch crops such as salads; or replanting an area used to grow one crop, perhaps potatoes, immediately with winter greens. You may also have areas on a small plot which simply aren't suitable for some crops – shady areas and sun-lovers, for example. It is not an exact science

therefore and tends for most of us to be a bit of a compromise.

### STARTING WITH CROP ROTATION

It stands to reason that the longer you can go without growing the same crop on any one patch the better, but for practical purposes most experts would recommend a three or four-year crop rotation (any more than four starts to become cumbersome). In other words, no one crop should be sown or planted on any one patch for three or four years. Which option you go for depends partly on the size of your plot, since a four-year cycle is a little easier to organise on a larger veg patch or allotment.

Raised beds can make rotations a little easier to follow since they naturally divide the plot in a very obvious way. Simply label them 1-10, for example, and planning becomes easier to visualise and record.

Having decided which system is right for you, now comes the task of splitting your crops, on pencil and paper and later in your seed storage box, into their rotational groups. ➤

## TYPICAL GROUPS

Groups tend to be based on your crops' family history – in other words which is related to which. There are always exceptions and those outsiders which aren't related to any other common crop, e.g. sweetcorn, are co-opted into other groups according to their growing needs, or simply put where convenient.

#### ■ CABBAGE FAMILY (BRASSICAS):

Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, kohlrabi, oriental greens, radish, swede and turnips

#### ■ PEA FAMILY (LEGUMES):

Peas, broad beans (French and runner beans suffer from fewer soil problems and can be grown wherever convenient)

#### ■ ONION FAMILY:

Onion, garlic, shallot, leek

#### ■ POTATO FAMILY:

Potato, tomato, (pepper and aubergine suffer from fewer problems and can be grown anywhere in the rotation)

#### ■ ROOT CROPS (EXCLUDING SWEDE AND TURNIP):

Beetroot, carrot, celeriac, celery, Florence fennel, parsley, parsnip and others

#### ■ THE OUTSIDERS:

Sweetcorn, leafy salads (lettuce, lamb's lettuce, endive); the cucurbits (cucumber, marrow, courgette, squash) can be slipped in where convenient among other crops, again because they suffer less from soil problems. Simply avoid growing them in the same place for too long.

## ODD EXCEPTIONS

■ Perennial crops such as asparagus and rhubarb are not included in the annual rotation, since they are permanent residents.

■ Climbing French beans and runner beans tend to suffer less from soil-borne pests and diseases and it is convenient on many sites to grow them in the same place using permanent supports.

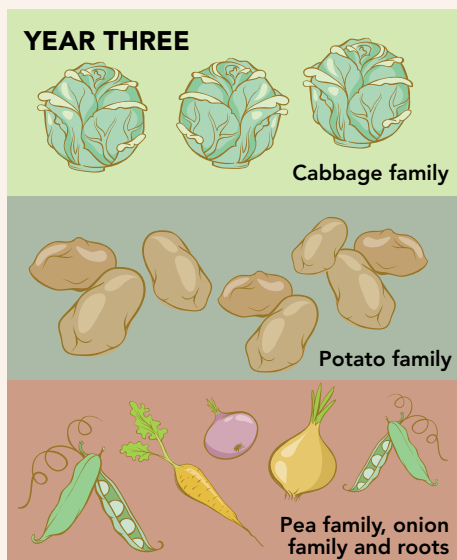
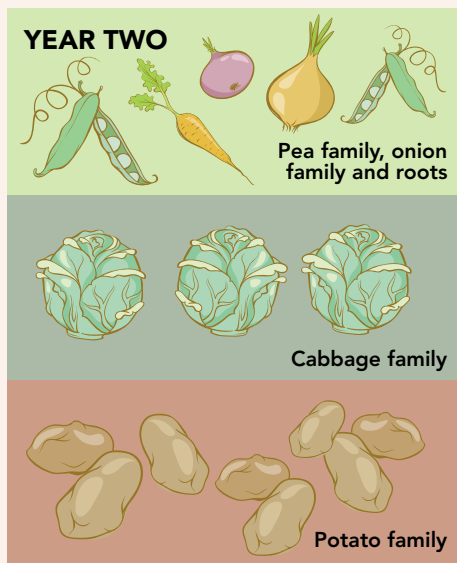
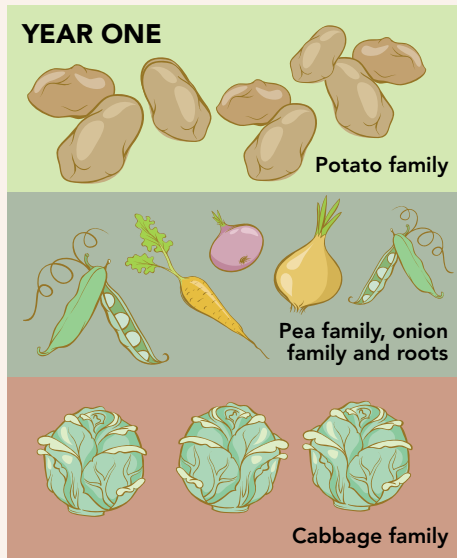
■ Peppers and aubergines (potato family) are more often grown in warmth under cover, taking them out of the rotation on the patch.





## THREE-YEAR ROTATION

Simply divide your plot into three equal areas and sow or plant as shown, bumping them along each year.



### TOP TIP

You can certainly adapt the groupings and rotations shown here to suit your cropping preferences. Just remember the general rule; no one crop should be grown in any one patch of soil for more than one year

## FOUR-YEAR ROTATION

The four-year rotation allows you the space to split the pea family (legumes) and the roots for a more meaningful rotation:

### YEAR ONE

Section one: Pea family  
Section two: Cabbage family  
Section three: Potato family  
Section four: Onion family and roots

### YEAR TWO

Section one: Cabbage family  
Section two: Potato family  
Section three: Onion family and roots  
Section four: Pea family

### YEAR THREE

Section one: Potato family  
Section two: Onion family and roots  
Section three: Pea family  
Section four: Cabbage family

### YEAR FOUR

Section one: Onion family and roots  
Section two: Pea family  
Section three: Cabbage family  
Section four: Potato family

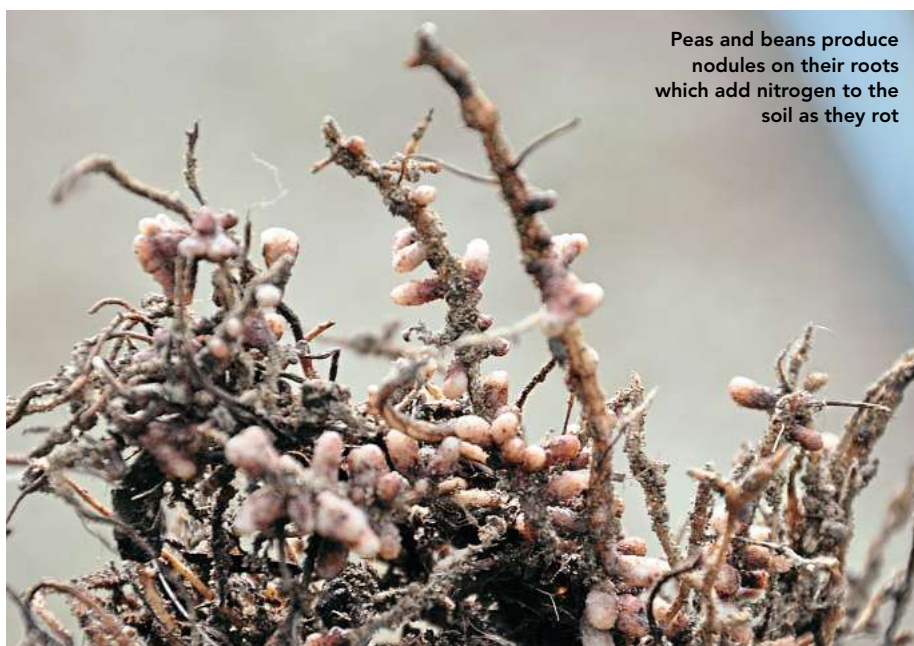
## FEEDING FRENZY

The three-year rotation (left) makes use of the fact that each group prefers slightly different soil management and/or brings its own advantages to the soil. For example:

In year one potatoes help clear the soil of weeds in preparation for the legumes, onions and roots. Manure can be added in the autumn prior to planting to enrich the soil.

Legumes add nitrogen to the soil via naturally occurring root nodules, but their partners, carrots and parsnips, do not like manure. Helpfully this will have broken down in the soil by this stage

Leafy brassicas love manure and lime, giving you the opportunity to enrich the soil before planting those crops. They can also benefit from any nitrogen left behind by the legumes. ■



Peas and beans produce nodules on their roots which add nitrogen to the soil as they rot



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# ANNE'S TOP 10 MOST IRRITATING WEEDS

We all have weeds that fight back in the veg patch. Here Anne Swithinbank reveals how she deals with her repeat offenders

**W**eeds are plants growing in the wrong place and compete with crops for light, space, water and nutrients. Yet viewed differently, some weeds are almost beneficial as their roots might prevent winter erosion, improve structure, attract beneficial creatures, and their tops are useful for rotting down into compost.

Some, such as chickweed, dandelion, nettle tips and ground elder, are even edible. You can

divide weeds into two kinds. First, there are the persistent, perennial kinds (think horsetail, couch and bindweed) that blight neglected plots and are generally controlled by hand weeding or smothering. Second, there are annual kinds (like speedwell and bittercress) which tend to be more of a problem on established plots, are easier to hoe out or pull up, and should never be allowed to seed. My worst weeds are probably creeping buttercup and speedwell but they are not necessarily the most irritating.



## 1 TORMENTIL (*POTENTILLA REPTANS*)

Creeping cinquefoil or tormentil arrived here with some barerooted gooseberries, and still uses them as a stronghold. Rosettes of strawberry-like leaves grow from long, thin taproots which sprout again if broken, and plants can leap pathways by sending out runners armed with miniature plants. The brittle roots stick behind in my clay soil, making attempts at weeding more like propagation. Yellow, five-petalled flowers might be cheering but are rarely produced.



## 3 FIELD BINDWEED (*CONVOLVULUS ARVENSIS*)

Field bindweed is an especial problem around fruit trees and bushes because white, root-like stems mingle and can penetrate deeply. Once you have rid an area by weeding, use a vertical barrier at least 45cm (18in) deep to prevent it creeping back from adjacent areas beyond your control.



## 4 HORSETAIL (*EQUSETUM ARVENSE*)

Field horsetail is a weed of neglected plots and although we don't have it, I hate having to deliver the bad news to gardeners who do. Succulent, fertile spring shoots with cone-like tops are followed by stems like small green fir trees, with all dying back in winter to rhizomatous stems capable of penetrating 2m (6½ft) deep. Digging out, smothering or treating with glyphosate based weedkillers (most effective in late summer after bruising the foliage) have only a minor impact. These tenacious qualities are hardly surprising in a plant whose ancestors dominated the understorey of Palaeozoic Forests over 100 million years ago.



## 2 COUCH GRASS (*ELYMUS REPENS*)

Outbreaks of couch grass require careful handling. They slow down digging and weeding but at least the pernicious roots are shallow. Patient forking followed by smothering will eliminate it.





## 5 DOCKS (*RUMEX CRISPUS*)

Never make the mistake of rotavating docks as there is no better way of propagating them. Taproots run deep and soon take hold. Winkling one or two out is quite satisfying but large numbers, especially those growing under paving slabs, are most irritating.

## 6 SMALL NETTLES (*URTICA URENS*)

We leave clumps of nettles as food plants for caterpillars but they do seed into the kitchen garden. Yet young tips make lovely soup, steeped stems make liquid plant food and pulling large clumps from the soil is really satisfying.



## 7 COMMON FIELD SPEEDWELL (*VERONICA PERSICA*)

Common field speedwell infests my kitchen garden and recycles itself by seed in and out of the compost heaps. Fortunately, this annual is easy to hoe out though fiddly to hand weed from between carrots.



## 8 PERENNIAL BUTTERCUP (*RANUNCULUS REPENS*)

I have a love-hate relationship with this perennial buttercup. It might seed and run but at least it won't regrow from portions of root. We grow whoppers on our rich clay soil and forking out one plant can sometimes clear a satisfying 45cm (18in) square.



## 9 HEDGE WOUNDWORT (*STACHYS SYLVATICA*)

Hedge woundwort is a pernicious weed around our fruit bushes and perennial crops, spreading by means of its shallow but fast-rooting rhizomes. I daren't turn my back on its soft leaves and tall stems of small pink-purple flowers for long.

## 10 HAIRY BITTERCRESS (*CARDAMINE HIRSUTA*)

Hairy bittercress looks like a miniature watercress or lady's smock and is edible. This annual is a weed of nursery plants and often enters gardens in the tops of flowerpots. Seeds develop on the tiniest of plants and are ejected in all directions.



## EXPERT'S CHOICE

As I live in Devon, it seemed a good idea to ask a professional gardener from up north to nominate their most irritating weed. Mark Pethullis is part of the team caring for the walled garden at the National Trust property Beningbrough Hall near York and points the finger at *Oxalis corniculata*. I was surprised because I tend to think of this small but persistent, yellow-flowered oxalis as something of a greenhouse escapee. "Persistent taproots survive to -15°C and seem to enjoy our soil which, as we are near the river Ouse, is loam with sandy pockets," explained Mark. "The oxalis creeps around box and lavender hedging and we can never get it all out. It disappears in winter but then reappears in adjacent rows of peas, or spring onions." Ripe pods ping seeds a fair distance, so the weed spreads easily. "We control oxalis in the pathways by spraying with a glyphosate based weedkiller but around the crops it has to be removed by hand." (Picture shows the purple form.)



INSET: Mark Pethullis, one of the gardening team at Beningbrough Hall near York



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## SOWING SPECIAL

# On your marks, set, SOW!

The time has arrived to start ripping open those seed packets. It's a really exciting time for veggie gardeners with just a few weeks to get most of your veg sown. Emma Rawlings has some top tips to improve your success

**R**aising your own veg from seed is such a joy and seeing those tiny little green shoots emerge is a thrill for all gardeners. Sowing can start quite early if growing crops in pots under protection, however, sowing directly on to the plot may need to be delayed according to your conditions. The sowing dates of most subjects can stretch a little so don't be in too much of a hurry to get things sown. So, when to start? It depends when you are reading this but if it is early March you may want to just want to hold fire on sowing outdoors. Indoors you can start some of the tender crops in a propagator or on a windowsill now. ➤





## WHEN TO DIRECT SOW

CROP	SOUTH	MIDLANDS	SCOTLAND
Potatoes	Early March	Early-mid March	End March –mid April
Parsnip	Early-Mid March	Mid March-early April	Early April-May
Lettuce	March	Mid Mar-early April	Late April-early May (under cloches possible slightly earlier)
Carrots	Early March	Mid March-April	April
Tomatoes (Starting seeds off in the warm and to be grown as a greenhouse crop)	February-April	Early March-April	Mid to late March

## BOOK A SOWING DAY

Early to mid-April – book a day in your diary for a sowing day. This is a peak moment to sow pretty much all veg crops in the ground or in cell trays. Get a wide range sown now – you can always sow some afterwards as well – but just get some things in just in case you run out of time later.

## SOW WHEN CONDITIONS ALLOW

The above table of sowing dates is just a very rough guide. Conditions will vary around the country and even locally. Your plot may be higher and colder or windier, or you may live in a frost pocket. Your soil may be clay and not warm up very quickly. There are many factors affecting the best time to start sowing and it is often just trial and error for each gardener. After a couple of

years you may get a feel for what is right for your plot or ask gardening neighbours what they do. The peak time for most things in many parts of the country is the month of April. In some years parts of the country may have an early spring,

others a late one. Sometimes we have a good weather early on and then a cold or wet snap scuppers the best-laid sowing plans.

**“A GOOD GARDENER SOWS ONE SEED FOR THE BUGS, ONE FOR THE WEATHER AND ONE FOR HIMSELF”**

## DIRECT SOWING

This is sowing straight into the ground and shouldn't be done too early. One of the main reasons for poor germination is the soil being too cold and wet. It depends on where you live, your soil type and when spring kicks in. Some subjects are recommended to be sown early, such as parsnips, but sowing in February or even early March may give poor results. It is better to wait and sow mid to late March or even later in some parts of the country. Carrots are one crop that is often sown too early with mixed results. If in doubt wait a week or two. If you sow carrots and other crops outside very early you may find germination is sporadic and the seedlings grow slowly. Later sown ones will grow faster and even overtake the earlier ones, so you don't actually gain anything.

## SOW THICKLY OR THINLY?

There are two schools of thought here. Sowing thinly reduces the need to thin out the young seedlings to give room between them.





## STEP BY STEP SOWING ON THE PLOT



**STEP 1:** Lightly dig over the surface if it hasn't already been done. Rake over the soil to break down the larger clumps of earth to create a fine crumbly surface. Remove large stones, leaving small ones for drainage.



**STEP 2:** Place a string line or measuring board on the ground and create a straight seed drill using a stick or side of a hoe. Straight rows make things easier later on, helping you to distinguish crop from weeds.



**STEP 3:** Water the seed drill dribbling water gently from the watering can. It is only the base of the drill you are soaking. Let it soak in and water a couple of times if necessary to soak it well.



**STEP 4:** Tap the packet to drop seed as you move along the row. Or put a little seed in the palm of one hand and pinch a seed between finger and thumb of the other, releasing along the row. Cover with fine soil.



However, some seed will not germinate or pests may get to them first. A good gardener sows one seed for the bugs, one for the weather and one for themselves.

### AFTER SOWING

Mark the row each end with sticks and label. If there is no rain for the next few days sprinkle water over the rows using a watering can with a fine rose. As soon as the seedlings emerge and are large enough to handle, remove some if they have been sown thickly to give a little room between each. As they grow remove more to the ultimate spacing as suggested on the seed packet. ➤

### WHY SOW IN LINES?

It is easier to mark the row and recognise the crop seedlings as opposed to weed seedlings. It makes it easier to space sow the seed and to thin out later.



You can buy measuring sticks or make your own to give you a straight line to sow to.



### EASY PEASY ROW MARKERS

Save pencil-thick straight branches whenever you are pruning any material in the garden. Cut into 30cm-60cm (12-24in) lengths. Scrape off the top bit of bark using a knife. Using a permanent marker just write in the name of the crop. These markers stand tall and the writing doesn't fade. It works with short lengths of bamboo cane, too.



# PROTECTED SOWING

Many gardeners find that direct sowing into the ground can be a bit hit and miss; with some crops sowing in pots or seed trays first gives better and faster results. You don't need a greenhouse although they are useful. You can start crops on a kitchen windowsill and harden them off gradually in a cold frame or mini greenhouse before planting out.

## WHAT TO SOW IN POTS

Most crops can be sown in pots or cell trays first but exceptions include parsnips and carrots although even these have been experimented with and some gardeners have had success sowing carrots in cell trays and transplanting clumps of seedlings while they are still small. Parsnip seed can also be pre-germinated on some damp kitchen paper and then sown.

## TENDER VEG

**Examples include:** Tomatoes, aubergines, peppers, cucumbers, squashes, courgettes, French and runner beans, sweetcorn.

These are best sown in small pots or cell trays in multipurpose compost and placed in a propagator or on a warm windowsill to germinate. Once germinated keep in the warm and transplant into individual pots or large cell trays and grow on inside until mid- to late April when they can be moved to a cold greenhouse to grow on.



Turn to page 92 to see our tried and tested special on sowing equipment

Broad beans and other beans are best sown in large cell trays or in small pots

## BRASSICAS

**Examples include:** Cabbage, broccoli, cauliflowers, kale.

These are prone to pest and disease attack and by sowing and growing into a strong plant first before planting out increases your chances of success. Cell trays with cells a couple of inches in diameter are good for starting off these crops.

## ALLIUMS

**Examples include:** Onions, shallots, garlic cloves and leeks.

They can be direct sown or sown in cell trays (small cells) first. Leeks are usually direct sown fairly thickly, thinned out and when pencil thick transplanted into their proper spacings. However, they can also be sown in cell trays. ■



Cell trays with small cells are ideal for starting off leeks and onions



Medium-sized cell trays about 5cm/2in square are ideal for starting off brassicas such as cabbage and cauliflowers. Sow two seeds per cell to allow for the occasional germination failure

## TOP TIP

If sowing in cell trays or pots and you have plenty of seed, sow two or three seeds per cell or pot. If they all germinate simply remove the excess to leave the strongest seedling



Sow large squash seeds in large cell trays or individual small pots

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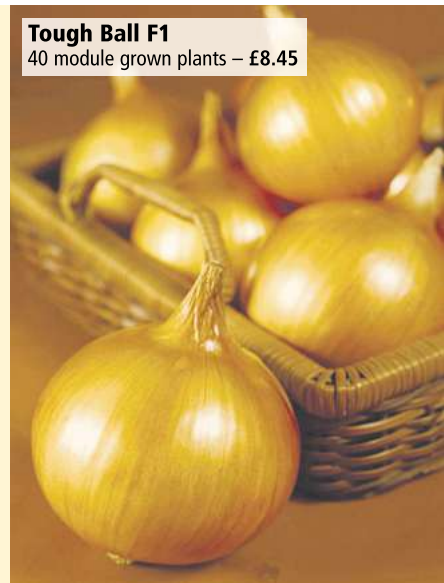
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# Mind the gap

Getting the right distance between crop plants and rows can make a huge difference to yields, as organic gardening guru Charles Dowding explains

**S**pace between plants affects yield, health, numbers of some pests and harvest quality. Yet there are different versions given of spacings for each vegetable.

How do you know which is best for your plot?

To help you decide, let's look at how spacing affects growth. Often there are choices and it depends what you grow, and how. Also there are limits to how close you can go and I give optimum spacings for most vegetables, with explanations for each, so you can be confident in finding your own best spacings.



Mustard and rocket planted in square blocks

## IN LINES OR ON THE SQUARE?

Many vegetables can be grown equidistantly in blocks, and most spacings here refer to that method when I give one measurement. It's called 'planting on the square' with the same space in all directions.

However, some vegetables are simpler to manage in rows, such as climbing beans and peas, which need support, (though wigwams are possible too) and carrots, which are easiest to sow and hoe in lines. For these vegetables I give two measurements, where 10x45cm (4x18in) means each plant is the first distance from its neighbour, and the rows are spaced by the second distance.

Both sets of spacings work on beds, and a third variation is when you grow on flat ground without differentiation into beds. Vegetables are then in lines or rows, which need extra space to walk between: use these figures as a guide and add distance according to your preference.

## MIXED CROPPING

Be careful when growing space-demanding vegetables next to slow-growing and smaller ones. For example, I never grow courgettes on a bed with other vegetables; it's not only their greed for

space, but their roots, which suck moisture and nutrients from surprising distances.

Where possible, keep tall broad beans and wide-spreading brassicas and potatoes at the end of beds, or all together, and match other vegetables according to their size. Lettuce, carrots and spinach grow well as neighbours, or beetroot alongside onions.

Also, you can grow temporary crops close to long-term ones, such as sowing radish between parsnips, and planting spinach in a row, 30cm (12in) from sown parsnips. Your spring harvests of radish and spinach are finished before the parsnips need their space.

## DOES CLOSER MEAN HIGHER YIELD?

There is a limit to plant density and you need good soil fertility to support the extra growth. Close-spaced carrots, for example, grow more leaves, but proportionately fewer roots, and smaller too. Tomatoes become a tangle of leaf, stem and trusses that are difficult to access, with more risk of damp lingering and blight taking hold and spreading between touching leaves. Sometimes closer spacings give more leaves to harvest, but they are smaller and take



## CROP SPACINGS

### SALAD LEAVES

Salad plants give many options because spacings depend both on how you sow and how you pick, also to a lesser extent on which salads you grow. At each end of a wide spectrum are two distinct possibilities.

If you like lines of seedlings for cutting small leaves, a close spacing of 3x15cm (1x6in) is good. You can go even closer but this increases the risk of mildew and yellowing, because some lower leaves do not have enough light and air. It is necessary to sow every month at least, and the speed of harvest from using a knife is reduced by the need to fish out yellow and diseased leaves, particularly on second and third cuts.

If you like larger leaves, stronger flavours and to make fewer sowings, space salad plants wider apart and equidistantly, with 15-22cm (6-9in) between each one, which allows them to produce over a long period. Each plant has access to more nutrients, air and moisture, and produces no yellow leaves, once the first pick-and-tidy is done. Use thumb and fingers to twist off outer leaves every five to seven days, instead of cutting across the top.

This allows faster regrowth because plants' inner leaves are undamaged by a knife cut and quickly become large leaves. Larger leaves are quick to pick, keep well in the fridge and can be broken into pieces when you want small-leaved salads. The restaurants I supply do this and in last October's *Stella* magazine (weekend Telegraph) a reviewer wrote, "The salad flavours were so strong and fresh you could make out the difference in every mouthful."



### SALAD HEARTS

Plants need extra resources to make solid hearts so lettuce which makes good leaves for 10 weeks at 22cm (9in) spacing, will make a better heart at 30cm (12in). Also there is less chance of slugs hiding in a dense canopy of lower, yellowing leaves, and plants are more likely to find the extra moisture they need when hearts swell. Otherwise the heart leaves may suffer tipburn, a rotting caused by roots having too little access to water.

'Little Gem' is an exception and can be as close as 12cm (5in) if you want earlier, small hearts, whereas hearting endive and chicory plants grow larger than lettuce, needing 39cm (15in) at planting time, from June to August. ➤



Spacings can vary a bit depending on soil and ultimate size of crop you want to achieve. Note that in this picture carrots have been sown too close to this potato crop (above)



Some endive planted in a square block

longer to pick, so there is no real gain. Optimum spacings allow plants to fill available space without crowding, to stay healthy and also to give some reduction of weed growth by shading the soil.

### WIDE SPACINGS AND POORER SOIL

In theory roots may need to travel further in poor soil for the moisture and nutrients they need. However, I have noticed that even with extra space, plants in poor soil tend to grow small. For better growth I would improve soil fertility by spreading some compost, seaweed or rockdust, whatever is possible, to allow closer spacings.

Plants actually grow better when they are not too far from any neighbours because they are sociable like us. For this reason I interplant fast-maturing, companion vegetables to help widely spaced plants in their first few weeks. My favourite is lettuce (for picking outer leaves over four to six weeks) between Brussels sprouts and other winter brassicas. I gain a harvest, and the brassicas establish well.







Leeks can be planted individually

## LARGE LEAFY VEG

Chard is a great example of how growth changes with spacings. Using plants of the same variety, I plant at 9x15cm (3½x6in) for large numbers of salad leaves, and at 30-37cm (12-15in) for leaves to boil and stir-fry. Spinach and leaf beet use similar spacings but kale needs more room, up to 50cm (20in) for a long harvest period of fair-sized leaves.

Leeks can go in as single plants at 15cm (6in) or at 30cm (12in) for module sown clumps with two to four leeks in each clump.

Celery needs care because if given more than 30cm (12in), it does not self blanch and also makes sideshoots rather than growing the main stem. I plant at 25cm (10in) and harvest smaller heads in summer, with a second sowing in May to have autumn celery.

## BRASSICAS

As with salads, wider space gives bigger hearts; but another factor is variety of cabbage. My favourite autumn hearting variety is 'Filderkraut' and they weigh up to 5kg (11lbs) each, as long as they have 50-60cm (20-24in) of space. Closer spacings mean you can have smaller and earlier-maturing hearts.

Early cabbages such as 'Greyhound' and 'Derby Day' need less space since they mature so quickly. Plant in the range 30-40cm (12-16in), and this works for calabrese too. Or, if you want longer-lived broccoli to crop over a long period, Brussels sprouts with firm buttons and cauliflowers of a good size, space at 60cm (24in).



Just 18 days after planting out see how these brassicas on the right have filled their space

# ROOT VEGETABLES

## ONION AND SHALLOT SEED OR SETS

These can be grown from seed and from sets, both are worth trying according to your desired results. When grown from seed they can be sown in rows at 5x39cm (2x15in), or raised as multi-sown plants, average four onions in a clump and each clump spaced at 30cm (12in). Shallots from seed grow well in two or three plants per clump, and each shallot seed makes a bulb of two or three segments.

When grown from sets, onions and shallots want spacing at an average 7x30cm (3x12in), with more or less space to vary the size of bulbs. However, I would not go closer than 5cm (2in) in the row, to have less risk of mildew spreading over leaves that are touching.

## CARROT

For medium-size roots allow 1x22-30cm (½x9-12in), but sow two seeds per 1cm (½in) to have some thinnings of small roots. Start harvesting six to eight weeks from sowing and pull roots selectively, so the final roots have more space to grow.



Carrots sown in rows 30cm (12in) apart



These onion 'Stuttgarter' were module sown and planted out in April 30cm (12in) apart

## PARSNIP

It all depends how big you like them: use the carrot spacing for baby parsnips or for late sowings and go up to 10x30cm (4x12in) for large roots. The latter are often not as woody as made out to be, and you get more root for less cleaning before cooking.

## POTATO

Vary spacings according to the type of potato, anything from 30cm (12in) for first earlies to harvest in June, to double that distance for maincrops, especially when you want baking potatoes.

## CELERIAC

Everything needs to be right, including the spacing. Celeriac needs 40-45cm (15-18in) in order to have sufficient moisture and nutrients, without which it simply does not grow, and sometimes makes more stem than root.

## BEETROOT

Beetroot transplants well and seedlings establish better undercover than outside, where they are favourite to sparrows and woodlice. Like onions from seed, plant clumps of an average four beetroot at 30-40cm (12-15in), then make first pickings of the largest root in each clump when at the size you like to eat them: carefully twist it out and leave the others undisturbed, to continue growing for later harvests.



Parsnips being thinned to their desired spacing, up to 10x30cm (4x12in)



## BEANS AND PEAS

### BROAD BEANS

I sow at 10x45cm (4x18in) in both autumn and early spring and if most plants survive winter, I thin out a few, because November-sown plants send up new stems in spring. If spaced too close the pods are thinner, less numerous and harder to find.

### PEAS

Peas can multi-task. If you like their shoots for salads and greens, space at 25-30cm (10-12in), preferably a tall variety in order to have lots of new growth – start picking when plants are 20-30cm (8-12in) tall. For pods, plants need more room and also some varieties need more than others, best check the seed packet. I grow medium-high peas such as 'Greenshaft' in rows across beds, at 15x45cm (6x18in).

### SUMMER BEANS

Two considerations are: allowing room for picking and quality of harvests, because close spacing makes picking harder and beans are smaller, possibly more prone to rotting. On average 40cm (15in) works well for dwarf French beans. You have choices with climbing beans, say in double rows across beds 30x60cm (12x24in) and with 90cm (36in) between a double row. You could grow up wigwams 30cm (12in) between plants, in a circle of 1m (39in) diameter.



Broad beans are best planted at the end of a bed

## FRUITS OF SUMMER

### TOMATO, CORDON UNDERCOVER

Resist the temptation to crowd plants in a small space, because tomatoes are healthier for having air around their leaves, with less chance of potato blight. I use an average spacing of 45-50cm (18-20in), which gives room for regular maintenance of plants and picking the fruit. (See picture below.)

### PEPPER, CHILLI, AUBERGINE

Similar spacing to tomatoes helps plants keep stay healthy in late summer when they give most fruit. The small variation is that chillies and peppers grow a little smaller than most aubergines, but it also depends on variety so check the details.



### CUCURBITS: COURGETTE, SQUASH, PUMPKIN, MELON, CUCUMBER

These grow fast and easily fill 60cm (24in), even though it looks wide at planting time. Planting closer makes courgettes harder to pick, squash and pumpkin fruits smaller, and increases the chances of mildew on leaves in a wet summer.

### SWEETCORN

An average spacing on beds is 30cm (12in), for one cob per plant. If you are short of plants or seeds, going wider is possible, for two cobs per plant, although the second cob is smaller.

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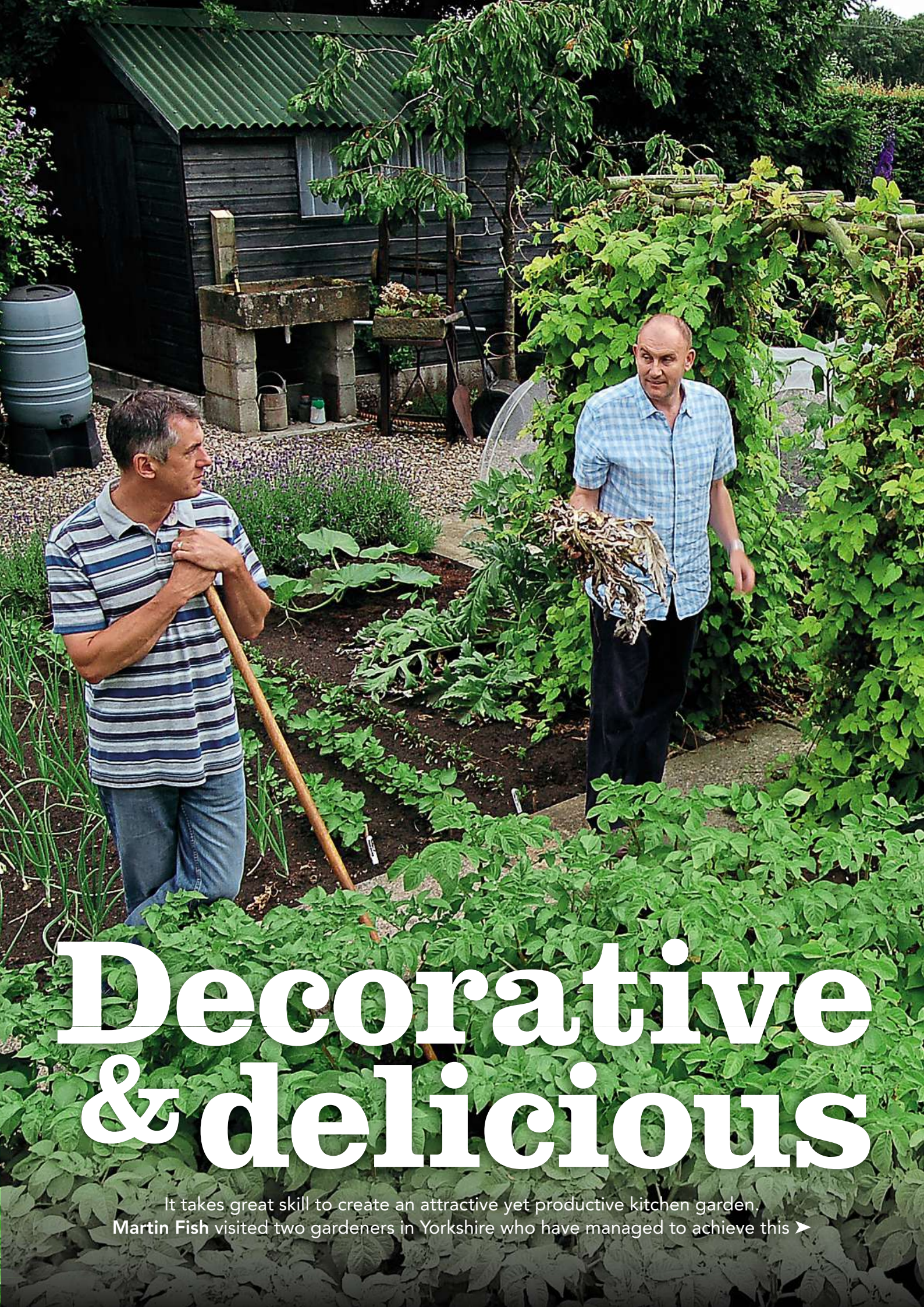


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# Decorative & delicious

It takes great skill to create an attractive yet productive kitchen garden. Martin Fish visited two gardeners in Yorkshire who have managed to achieve this ►





**ABOVE:** Broad beans growing in a cane support

**TOP RIGHT:** Robert lifting a crop of new potatoes

**ABOVE RIGHT:** The large hen run with views to the Yorkshire Wolds

**BELOW:** Globe artichokes add structure to the garden

When Robert Scott and Jarrod Marsden bought their house with a one-acre plot in 2000, their dream was to create a garden full of interest. Work began on the project straight away in creating what is now a wonderful garden that is open to the public through the summer to raise money for several charities.

Linden Lodge and its garden are situated near the village of Wilberfoss approximately 10 miles east of York at the foot of the Yorkshire Wolds. The house was built in 1980 and when Robert and Jarrod bought it the garden was laid out mainly to lawn, giving them an almost blank canvas to work with. The main design for the one-acre garden was done by Robert and included formal gardens with ponds and water features, herbaceous borders, box hedging, a woodland area, wildlife pond and the all-important fruit and vegetable garden.



Robert has a background in horticulture and is head gardener at York St John University, where he now works four days a week, allowing him time to tend his own garden. Jarrod, an accountant by profession, is very interested in gardening and also spends a great deal of time helping to develop and maintain the garden, as well as planning charity open days.

When laying out the garden, Robert divided the plot into several areas which are separated by hedges and fences which, along with shrubs and trees, form the main structure of it. The garden contains many unusual plants that are now well established to provide colour and interest all year round. The original vegetable garden was in the style of an allotment with a polytunnel, greenhouse and large growing beds where vegetables were grown in traditional long rows. However, it soon became evident that an allotment-sized plot produced far too much for their needs, so it was decided to transform the area into the attractive but productive kitchen garden that we see today.

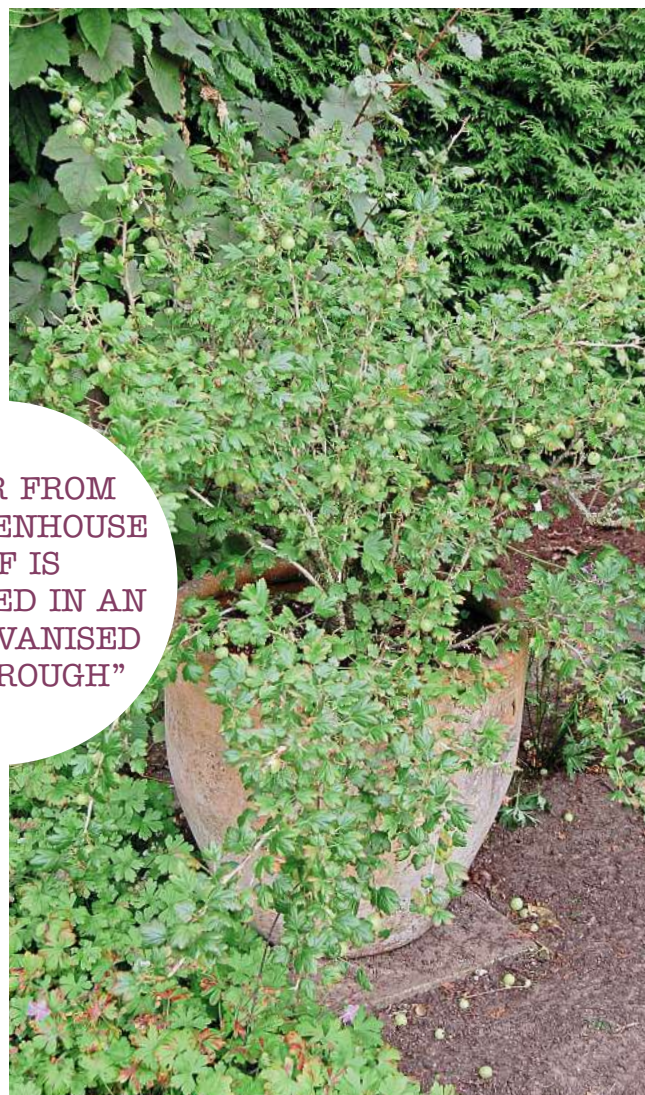
### HERBS AND VEG MINGLE

The kitchen garden now consists of several main growing beds that are divided by paved paths to give access for maintenance. At the centre of the paths is a wooden pergola that adds height and in the summer is covered with a lovely golden hop. The main block of growing beds are edged with lavender and gravel paths surround the area. The lavender not only adds colour to the garden, it also attracts much needed pollinating insects and bees. The





“WATER FROM  
THE GREENHOUSE  
ROOF IS  
COLLECTED IN AN  
OLD GALVANISED  
FIELD TROUGH”



fruit and vegetables are grown organically and as much as possible is done to encourage beneficial insects to pollinate some of the vegetables and the nearby fruit trees.

Adjoining the beds is a long border where a good selection of perennial herbs are grown. These Mediterranean plants thrive in the free-draining, sunny border and herbs such as rosemary, thyme, sage, chives and fennel have established to form a very attractive area.

To the back of the herb border is the large steel-framed greenhouse which was part of the original vegetable garden layout. This is used to raise seedlings and plants for the garden in spring, and during the summer, tomatoes, cucumbers and courgettes are grown, along with a selection of ornamental plants for display. At the side of the greenhouse are cold frames, again used to raise and harden-off a variety of different plants.

Water from the greenhouse roof is collected in an old galvanised field trough that was bought at a local farmers' auction. The water is used mainly on the nearby herb bed and containers, but to make the trough look a little more interesting, some aquatic plants have been introduced and there are even a few goldfish in it. The finishing touch is an old cast-iron pump which creates a quirky feature. There is mains water in the greenhouse and the garden, but rainwater is collected in butts from all the sheds and used to water the vegetables in dry weather.

There is also a large wooden shed opposite the greenhouse that was built when the garden was first laid out and this is still used as the potting shed. This is the ►



**TOP LEFT:** An old cattle drinking trough is used to collect water from the greenhouse

**ABOVE LEFT:** The orchard planted with a variety of apples

**ABOVE:** Gooseberries growing in a large pot

**LEFT:** The herb garden





**ABOVE:** The wisteria-covered arbour creates a cosy place to sit

**RIGHT:** The potting shed is in close proximity to the greenhouse

**BELOW:** The view from the seat under an arbour



nerve centre of the kitchen garden where Robert sows seeds, pricks out seedlings and pots plants, as well as being a store for gardening tools and equipment. It's also used to take a break from the garden and have a mug of tea! This is a proper potting shed and one that any gardener would be proud to have on a plot – me included.

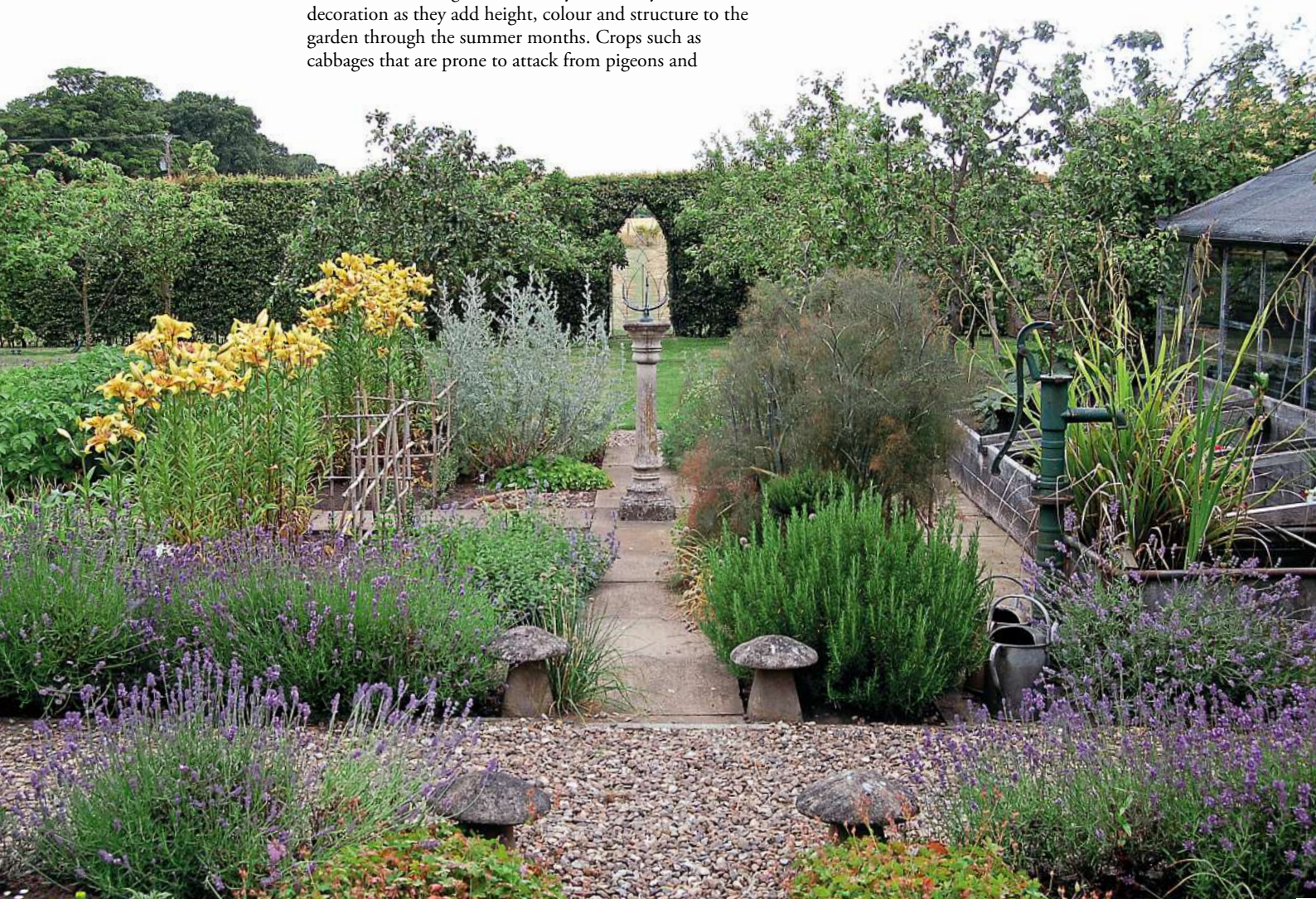
### STAPLES ARE KEY

In their allotment-style plot Robert and Jarrod grew a large selection of different vegetables, but over the years they have gradually reduced the amount and concentrate on what they really enjoy. They now grow early potatoes, onions, shallots, beetroot, carrots, parsnips, runner beans, broad beans, winter brassicas and sweetcorn. Globe artichokes are also grown, but they are mainly for decoration as they add height, colour and structure to the garden through the summer months. Crops such as cabbages that are prone to attack from pigeons and

butterflies are grown under frames covered in fine mesh and carrots are also protected with fleece to keep away carrot root fly.

A selection of cut flowers are grown in the garden and the borders surrounding the main veg beds. Flowers such as lilies, iris, day lilies, phlox and sweet peas not only make the garden look attractive through the summer, they also attract insects and provide a continuous supply of fresh flowers for the house and friends.

The orchard is situated next to the vegetable growing area and when the original layout was altered to the present design, the number of fruit trees was increased. There is now a good selection of eating and cooking apples in the orchard, several of which are old Yorkshire varieties. ➤





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**ABOVE:** Robert and Jarrod in the garden with the orchard in the background

**RIGHT:** Water is collected from the shed roofs

**FAR RIGHT:** The side gate into the garden



## THE GARDEN EVOLVES

Although very much a productive kitchen garden, Robert and Jarrod have worked hard to make it attractive and decorative which is reflected in the design. It has been well planned and planted over the past 15 years and due to the nature of growing vegetables, it changes a little each year.

Vistas have been created so that the kitchen garden can be enjoyed from different angles and one of the most impressive views is through the Gothic arch that leads from the main garden into the kitchen garden. Through the







**“VISTAS  
HAVE BEEN  
CREATED SO THAT  
THE KITCHEN  
GARDEN CAN BE  
ENJOYED FROM  
DIFFERENT  
ANGLES”**

gated archway there is a lovely view up a gravel path flanked by lavender to a statue at the end. In another part of the kitchen garden a wooden arbour has been built to create a covered seating area over which a wisteria is growing, and in late spring the long racemes of scented, blue flowers hang from the plant.

As you sit on the bench there is another good view across the kitchen garden, over the sundial towards the orchard area and beyond to an opening in the far hedge. To each side of the bench is a large terracotta pot with a gooseberry growing in it to illustrate that this is a productive garden. Elsewhere around the kitchen garden, old gardening and agricultural equipment has been used ornamentally with great effect, adding real character.

### BEYOND THE GARDEN GATE

The kitchen garden is just part of the original one-acre plot, but in 2010 Jarrod and Robert took on an extra five-acre field that is being developed as meadows where Shetland sheep graze and tree plantations are being established. They also keep a flock of mixed hens in a large grass run that has far-reaching views towards the Yorkshire Wolds. The hens roam freely, producing plenty of fresh eggs, and are protected from foxes by electric fencing. ■



**TOP:** A good crop of tomatoes in the greenhouse

**ABOVE:** A lovely pots store at the side of the potting shed

**LEFT:** The old push hoe is just one of the features in the garden

## GARDENS OPEN

For several years the gardens at Linden Lodge have been opened during the summer to raise money for charities such as Perennial – Gardeners' Royal Benevolent Society - and the National Garden Scheme (NGS), and over the years several thousands of pounds have been raised for these worthy causes. Groups are also welcome by appointment between May and July. Contact details and opening dates for 2015 can be found on [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)



# DIGGER FOR VICTORY

Fresh from being announced as winner of the Big Allotment Challenge, flight attendant Rob Smith came to see us at KG to tell us all about his passion for gardening

## HOW DID YOU GET INTERESTED IN VEG GROWING – WHERE DID IT ALL START?

Basically, it started with my grandad, Albert, when I was a kid. He had a great big garden with a big veg patch. He used to give me an old fishing net and gave me a boiled sweet for every cabbage white butterfly I could catch. So I used to run around the garden trying to catch butterflies to see if, by the end of the day, I

could get a bag of sweets and he wouldn't have any caterpillars on his cabbages.

## WHERE DO YOU GROW YOUR VEGETABLES AND FRUIT AT HOME?

I've just recently got a greenhouse, and I have a lot of things in pots in my back garden: a few fruit trees, miniature peaches, a fig tree, and a bay tree. All in big pots. Things I can move around. I've also got two allotments.

## WHAT ARE THE MAIN THINGS YOU LIKE TO GROW?

Runner beans, French climbing beans, broad beans. Different types of onions and shallots. Rather than just ordinary brown ones, I like to grow quite a lot of sweet ones. I'm currently growing some 'Walla Walla' sweet onions for the first time. They're supposed to be sweeter

Winner Rob Smith (centre) with judges (LTR) Jonathan Moseley, Thane Prince, Presenter Fern Britton and Jim Butters







## BIG ALLOTMENT WINNER



**LEFT:** Rob celebrating his birthday on the Big Allotment. **BELOW LEFT:** In week one, Rob made a 'Herb Crunch' mustard which included parsley, tarragon, thyme, and basil. **BELOW:** In the final, Rob produced the perfect cauliflower, a purple variety known as 'Graffiti'

butternut squash but grows better in the English climate. My butternut squash doesn't always ripen. This 'Honey Boat' grows like a triffid, you get hundreds off it and they're really nice baked. I've also got apples, cherries, pears, a quince, an apricot, redcurrants, whitecurrants, blackcurrants, raspberries, and gooseberries.

I grow romanesco, cauliflowers and sprouts, and this year I'm going to try flower sprouts (a combination of Brussels sprout and kale). I love savory cabbages, sweetheart varieties too. I do a few red cabbages but they grow so big. I grow carrots in buckets as my soil has so many hard bits – it's virtually solid clay.

### DO YOU GROW HERBS?

I've got a big bay tree in the back garden, I love that. I use the leaves in the winter for stews and stocks. But I love it in the summer – strip all the leaves off a twig and use it as a skewer on the barbecue. Stab your meat or your vegetables on to it and they taste of bay all the way through the middle. I've got creeping thyme coming up through the pathways on my allotment.

It only grows about 1cm or 2cm high and that looks lovely because you get all the pink flowers. I like a lot of mint and rosemary. I have sage also but I don't really use it, though I like the smell.

### HOW COME YOU HAVE SUCH AN INTEREST IN HERITAGE SEEDS?

It goes back to my grandad. He used to pick his veg and I always wondered why he left some to go to seed. He used to keep the seeds and hang them in the outhouse in brown paper bags. He never bought an F1 seed in his life. I used to see him do this and wondered why I was spending so much money on seeds. I was browsing online and came across Garden Organic. I rang them and said can I buy the seeds, and they said no, but you can join the charity. I grew a great



heritage pea last year, which was named after a vicar from a rectory garden in Northampton. They found it was one of the main peas grown in Henry VIII's time. Peas used to be a staple back then because they didn't have potatoes. They would grow them, dry them and then make them into a kind of gruel.

## TOP TIP

Protect brassicas by using pond netting, which you may find cheaper than buying other kinds of netting by the metre. Make hoops from blue water pipes, lay the netting over these and then weigh it down with bricks

### WHY DO YOU THINK HERITAGE SEEDS ARE SO SPECIAL?

There's a lot of nostalgia and a lot of history. Plants can go just because the supermarkets don't make enough return on them. And I don't think that's right. I think if you've got the room to grow it you don't need to grow a carrot that tastes of nothing but gives you 5000 of them; you may as well grow a carrot that takes a bit longer, might be a bit knobbly, looks weird, but it tastes like a carrot, and you've got a bagful rather than a barrowful. I like ugly and old. It's trying to get people not to grow the same old bog-standard stuff. You can grow an onion, but you don't have to grow an onion you can buy a sackful of for 50p in the supermarket. ➤



## HERITAGE SEED LIBRARY

Garden Organic's Heritage Seed Library (HSL) is a charitable organisation that aims to conserve seed varieties, which under ordinary circumstances, would have been in danger of being lost forever. Often, these will have been varieties that were once commercially available but have been dropped from the more commercial seed catalogues for whatever reasons. The HSL has more than 800 open-pollinated varieties. Membership is £18 a year. Among the benefits of joining is an annual HSL Seed Catalogue from which you can choose six varieties and also get a seventh 'lucky dip' variety. For more information visit [www.gardenorganic.org.uk/hsl](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/hsl)

Heritage and heirloom seeds are open-pollinated. This means that the seeds will have the same characteristics as the parent plant year on year and therefore remain true to type.

'F1 Hybrid' seeds are produced by crossing two varieties. However, the next generation of seeds from these F1 Hybrids will not share the same characteristics of the parent, so are not true to type.





**ABOVE:** Rob's greenhouse and pots on his Big Allotment Challenge plot. **LEFT:** For the final, the three contestants had some very demanding challenges, all of which had to be completed under strict, timed conditions



## CUCUMBER 'BOOTHBY'S BLONDE'

Rob won the grow challenge in episode two with cucumber 'Boothby's Blonde', a variety that has never been available commercially. This is an American cucumber grown for several generations by the Boothby family of Livermore, Maine. It is an early, ridge variety which produces oval fruit, 14-20cm (5½-8in) long, with yellow warty skin and little tufts of black hairs.



### WHAT MADE YOU APPLY FOR THE BIG ALLOTMENT CHALLENGE?

I was on Twitter and I saw the Big Allotment Challenge account. I'd had a couple of drinks and it was about half 10 at night. It was right up my street: Do you grow your own stuff? Yes. Do you make stuff with it? Yes. Are you interested in allotmenting? Yes. That was written for me, I thought. That's what I do. It just snowballed from a gin and tonic.

### YOU HAVE ALWAYS GROWN TO EAT, SO HOW DID YOU FIND HAVING TO GROW FOR SHOW?

Daunting. I'd say the hardest thing about the entire experience for me was the timing. For example, beetroots take 16 weeks to be ready but then Mother Nature throws a spanner in the works and gives you two weeks of bad weather. Well, suddenly that beetroot is two weeks behind. Or you have two weeks of really good weather and it's two weeks in advance. Timing and Mother Nature together, it's a shower's nightmare.

### WHAT WAS YOUR BEST MOMENT IN THE 'GROW' CHALLENGE?

I did like my cucumbers but the cauliflower in the final was best. I had four cauliflowers to choose from as show day neared but only one was up to standard on the day. I'd sown them all at the same time but had planted out each of them a week apart. And thank God that the final one I planted was the one that was perfect.

### WHAT EXPERIENCE OF FLOWER ARRANGING HAD YOU HAD BEFORE GOING ON THE SHOW?

No real experience. I'd cut some sweet peas off and stuck them in a jam jar. That literally was it. I really enjoyed the flowers probably the most. I was surprised because I didn't think I was going to enjoy it – I wouldn't know what I was doing, I'd look stupid, I wouldn't have a clue. Some of them I was terrible at but other ones where the structure was there already – such as the pots or the candelabra – I found easier.

### HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN YOU WERE ANNOUNCED AS THE WINNER?

I couldn't believe it to start with. It was just so surreal. It was brilliant. It seemed to go past in a flash. Watching it back you could tell that everyone was pleased. It was a lovely experience.

### HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO TAKE THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BIG ALLOTMENT CHALLENGE FURTHER?

I'd like to be involved in something to do with gardening, especially on the TV. I really enjoyed that. Getting the information across to younger people to get them trying to do it and also to people who are thinking about it, people who have got questions or want to start. A lot of people don't know where to start if they haven't got parents or grandparents who have done it. And it's getting people hooked on it because, once you're hooked, if you're a gardener and someone shows you a bit of dirt, you'll grow anything in it. And it's with you for life. ■



Rob's floral arch which won him Best in Show in the final episode

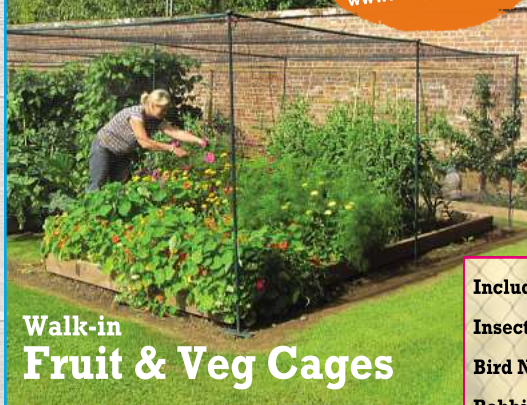


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# Easter Eggs and the Big Spring Clean

With Easter fast approaching it's time for some seasonal baking and, more importantly, giving the coop a spring clean, as Jane Howorth of the British Hen Welfare Trust explains



In winter, egg-laying often takes a seasonal dip

**D**espite providing our backyard gangs with the finest feed and lavishing upon them our daily attentions, the short dark days of the winter months leave many hens sulking and unproductive.

Whether you keep young utility pure breed chickens, commercial laying 'hybrids' or fabulous ex-bats, you may have experienced a big dip in laying. But take heart, there will be owners of rare breeds and older hens who have been doing all the usual chores: opening up their hen houses of a morning, filling the feed troughs, checking the water and mucking out, but have then had to buy eggs from the supermarket as the nest boxes lay empty for days, even weeks at a time.

## CHECKING HELPS CHICKENS

As daylight hours increase, fortunately most hens will start to lay more regularly so there are no excuses for not getting busy with a bit of Easter baking – try a traditional simnel cake and organise a British Hen Welfare Trust (BHWT) Free Range Friday (visit

[www.bhwt.org.uk/cms/freerangefriday/](http://www.bhwt.org.uk/cms/freerangefriday/) for more information).

While I am thinking of cakes... there are whole shelves sagging with tempting super-calorie-fragalistic chocolate eggs, cakes, treats and sweet meats in the shops at this time of year. Unfortunately, many are still made with eggs laid by hens kept in cages somewhere in the world.

Shockingly, while the small barren battery cages were declared illegal in the European Union on January 1, 2012, and every single British egg farmer complied with the ruling, since the ban came into force there are still millions of hens sat in the old cages in countries right across the EU. Given the austerity issues in Europe, welfare is not a priority for our politicians, but it is an issue we consumers can do something about – locally. So, no matter how posh the shop, how fabulous the wrapping, how cute the chicks and bunnies on the label or gingham-style ribbons and bows, do spend a few seconds reading the ingredients list. Think: checking helps chickens! Don't kid yourself, if the list doesn't say "contains free range eggs", assume the eggs come from a hen in a cage somewhere.





Easter weekend offers a great opportunity for spring cleaning your coop



Is your coop fit for purpose – do you need something more modern and spacious?



Barbecue wire brushes are a perfect tool for removing stubborn dirt



If the labelling doesn't say 'free range' assume the eggs are produced from a hen in a cage

In "ye olde tea rooms", garden centre cafes, farm shops and the like serving unwrapped fare, make a point of asking staff about the ingredients in your meal; it's surprisingly disappointing how many places (even upmarket ones) still use the cheapest eggs they can source. However, if enough customers speak up, you may persuade a 'trade up' to free range (Mr Kipling did it after all).

Once you have your guilt-free Easter treats in the cupboard and with a bank holiday weekend looming, there are no excuses left. It's time to give our hen houses and runs the Big Spring Clean.

### COOP UP TO SCRATCH?

You will never make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, so if you have spent winter cursing the bad design and shoddy workmanship of your leaky, drafty coop or it is starting to look like a shanty-town shack, then perhaps it is time to buy a new one?

Similarly, if the coop is sturdy but a bit on the small side and your birds are already a bit cramped, perhaps queuing for the nest box or you are planning to expand your flock during the year, you would be as wise to spend the day perusing adverts, prices and reviews of well built new coops rather than waste time trying to get your current one clean and up to scratch for another year.

Easter baking can begin with a traditional simnel cake



### ARMED FOR BATTLE

For those persevering though, get suitably dressed for the occasion in outdoor gear or overalls. It will be a dirty, dusty and wet job (and do get whatever you are wearing in a hot wash immediately you finish to guarantee no bugs have escaped the clean).

Start the clean as early as possible and on a nice bright day. Ideally, the hen house should be completely dry before you spread new litter, and cleaning often takes longer than anticipated. Bear in mind wooden sheds and coops dry out slowly, so don't use gallons of water unnecessarily.

Arm yourself with the usual tools: buckets or trugs, wallpaper scrapers, shovels, dust pans, wire brushes (the ones sold for cleaning barbecues are ideal and most have a built in scraper!), pump spray bottles, disinfectants and all the mite killing powders and potions you own.

### CLEAR THE SPACE

"Prevention is better than cure" and "a stitch in time saves nine" are things your grandma may well have said, and with good reason when it comes to hen house hygiene:

ridding the house of overwintering red mite eggs and adults, and making it inhospitable to newcomers now, will save you a whole lot of time and expense later in the season. Of course, it will also keep your hens

comfortable and pest free. This is especially important when sub zero temperatures have not had the opportunity to help knock back the pest population.

First job is to remove your birds from the area. Let them out for a peck about in the garden if it is safe to do so as they are of no assistance when it comes to cleaning their rooms. They will get under your feet, overturn your buckets and poo on your gloves should you leave them unattended.

Remember also that hens aren't grateful and just because you are spending your day cleaning their coop doesn't mean they will not raid the seed trays in your greenhouse or ravage a row of young radish the moment your back is turned.

### DEALING WITH MITES

Next, open up or disassemble the house as much as you can, taking out everything that can be removed (both equipment and furniture like perches, droppings trays and nestbox dividers). These items can be thoroughly washed, disinfected and left to dry or replaced with new ones if they are beyond cleaning or have any evidence of mites. Remember, the mites thrive in inaccessible, undisturbed places, so check underneath the droppings tray and on the ends of perches and the sockets they sit in as well as the more obvious cracks, crevices and joints in floors, walls and roof for the tiny red dots or the tell tale grey powder they leave behind.

Now ship out all the loose litter and bedding, but don't throw this away. Your dirty poultry litter contains a mass of nutrients and is a powerful compost activator, so mix it straight into your compost heap and cover. It would burn young roots if placed directly around your plants and, ➤



## GET GROWING

while not harmful, it is often a bit too whiffy and attractive to the dog to use around bigger shrubs and fruit trees, so composting first is best.

### VACCUUMING IS BEST

If you have a car vac or an old vacuum cleaner in the garage, then use it to rid the ceiling and walls of the hen house of as much dust, dander and cobwebs as you can. Warning: Do not use the snazzy new cleaner from under the stairs unless all members of your household have been consulted and are in agreement that it's okay to use it in the coop!

Use the brush attachment and run it slowly over every gap, groove and join; this is very effective in wooden coops. Modern plastic and composite coops are designed to be taken apart, moved away from the run and blasted clean with a power washer, but in wooden houses I prefer the vac, or brushing alone, as the dust, bugs and any pest eggs are totally removed, not just redistributed inside the coop, blown out of the door and into the run or mixed with water to soak into the ground directly under the house. Check and clean any windows to increase interior light levels and make sure ventilation grilles and holes are all clear.

Poultry manure and broken eggs adhere to wood and floors like superglue and if dry scraping isn't working you may need to soak then scrub or scrape the affected area before leaving to dry. I've already mentioned that a damp house is no good for your hens, but also a lot of anti-mite powders are less effective when wetted, so use water sparingly.

### OUTSIDE CLEANING

While the inside is drying, you can give the outside of the house and any wooden parts of the run a good brush down and a coat of



**It's important to get into all the cracks and crevices of your coop, including floor joints**



**Enjoy the new bedding you have put down as once the chickens return mayhem will ensue**

preservative. Now that oil based traditional creosote is no longer available, even pressure treated timber needs far more regular care as the water based treatments used don't protect wood for as long.

Mineral felt roofs seem to be getting thinner by the year, so make sure there are no tears or holes in yours and that they fully overlap the roof. If not, rip it off and fit new felt or replace it with something more substantial. There are an increasing number of people who are turning away from mineral felt for poultry coops as, if badly fitted, it can create the perfect hiding place for mites (yes they can live on the outside of the house as well as the inside).

Lock hinges and catches should all be oiled and working fine; then it is time to spray, shake

or scatter your chosen disinfectants and bug deterrents. Read all pack instructions carefully and concentrate the stuff in the nooks and crannies mites will head for if they arrive.

Finally, once everything is dry, replace all the parts and equipment, spread the new bedding and take a few moments to gaze upon the perfect, pine fragranced and satisfying scene... before allowing the hooligan residents back in to frantically kick litter everywhere as though searching for precious lost belongings and generally continue their dirty protest. Ho hum. ■

■ *For more details about the BHWT or if you have questions on your spring clean, come chat chickens with us at [www.BHWT.org.uk](http://www.BHWT.org.uk) or at our facebook page.*

**Let your chickens loose, but not too loose**





# When it comes to feeding your bantams... ...pellet size is important

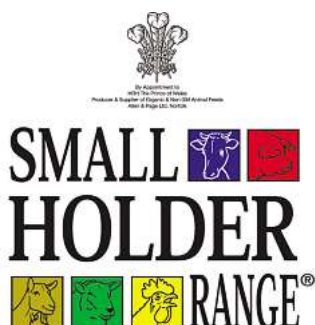


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\*Average pellet size 2.5mm x 8mm





MAKE A

# Mini-Greenhouse

Want to grow under cover but can't afford a polytunnel or greenhouse? Or perhaps you don't have the space? Not to worry, why not build something on a smaller scale? Joyce Russell demonstrates how

Pictures: Ben Russell



Strawberries do well in a mini-greenhouse

**N**ot every garden is large enough for a greenhouse or polytunnel, and not every gardener can afford to buy one of these structures. Most problems have a solution, however, and if you long for a bit of under cover growing, then don't be deterred! It isn't hard to make a mini-greenhouse that precisely fits your space.

You only need a few basic DIY skills, and the materials are cheap enough. Even a small structure opens up the possibilities for growing tomatoes, winter salad, melons and strawberries, for example; and for raising small plants from seed, a greenhouse is invaluable. Start with one mini-greenhouse and you may add more once you have mastered the technique.

## THE STRUCTURE

The tunnel made here fits neatly on a (6ft x 6ft) bed. It is free standing, but the structure will be more rigid if you fix it back against a fence. The stronger the grade of polythene used, the longer it will last. You can alter dimensions to suit your garden, just make sure that the hoops are no further than 80cm (31½in) apart.

**DESIGN TIP:** I originally made this structure without a top ridge and this led to a bit of water pooling on the polythene. I added in an extra batten as a ridge at the top and this solved the problem. The stronger the polythene, the less likely it is to stretch and collect water. The following instructions include a top ridge fixed in place along with the other battens.





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£55**

## WHAT YOU WILL NEED

### MATERIALS

- 6 lengths @ 1.5m reinforcing bar (as used to reinforce concrete)
- 3 lengths @ 4350mm of 19mm diameter alkathene water pipe, plus a 300mm length for making polythene clips
- 9 pressure treated wooden battens 46mm x 36mm x 1670mm

- 3 pressure treated wooden battens 46mm x 36mm x 1710mm
- 2 thinner lengths of pressure treated wood 46mm x 20mm x 1710 mm for 'sandwiching' door polythene
- 4 flat scraps of wood approx 17mm x 14mm x 5mm, to use as fixing blocks
- 27 galvanised pipe clips to fit round pipe
- Polythene

- Screws (preferably stainless steel):
- 54 @ 4mm x 20mm for fixing pipe clips,
- 16 @ 4mm x 40mm for fixing blocks and 'sandwich' rails
- 2 @ 5mm x 70mm for fixing top door rail

### TOOLS

Hacksaw, wood saw, screwdriver, tape measure, pencil, hammer, sandpaper, bradawl, spirit level (optional).

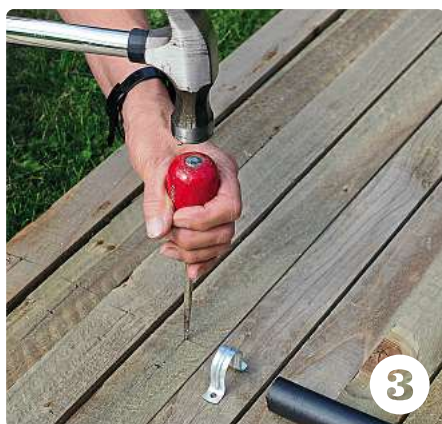
## STEP BY STEP MAKE A MINI GREENHOUSE



**1**



**2**



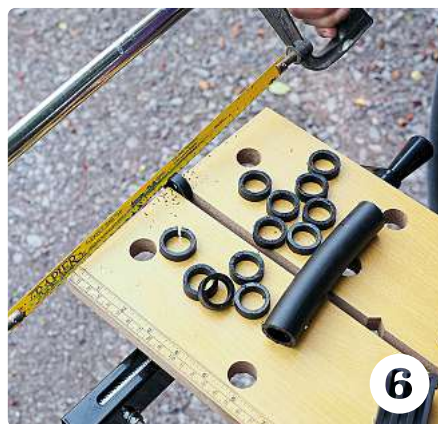
**3**



**4**



**5**



**6**

### STEP 1: POSITIONING THE REINFORCING ROD

The rod may look a bit rusted when you buy it but don't worry, there's a lot of iron to wear through and this will take years. Use a hammer to knock the bars into the ground. Three bars go at each side of this structure. Allow 80cm between each bar and knock them down until 110cm above soil level. Use a tape measure to check that heights are the same.

### STEP 2: FITTING PIPE

Slot the pipe over one piece of reinforcing rod and bend it round to make smooth curve when slid over the corresponding rod on the other side. Repeat to make three hoops. Push the ends of the pipe down below soil level until the curve on all three hoops is even and level.

### STEP 3: MARKING FOR PIPE CLIPS

Check that the pipe clips grip the pipe firmly. If they are too loose, give each one a squeeze until it fits snug enough that the pipe doesn't slip. Place a pipe clip at each end and in the middle of seven of the 1670mm lengths of wood. Mark where the fixing screws will go and use a bradawl to punch holes (this makes it easier to fix screws into the timber).

### STEP 4: FIXING PIPE CLIPS

Use 4mm x 20mm screws into pre-punched holes. Hold the timber level and make sure the clips grip tight.

### STEP 5: FITTING THE SIDE BARS

Use the pipe clips to fit all the lengths of wood from step 3 to brace the structure. Aim for even spacing (see photograph). Fix one of these pieces of wood across the top of the hoops to form a ridge.

### STEP 6: MAKING POLYTHENE CLIPS

Use the hacksaw to cut 10, 7mm rings from the short length of pipe listed in materials. Cut a slit in each of these rings to make a split ring. Try pulling each one to make sure there is enough flex for the ring to open, but enough tension for the ring to close and grip. You may need to practise to get the clip size strong enough but flexible enough to use. ➤





## STEP 7: FITTING THE POLYTHENE

For this structure I cut the polythene to 5000mm x 3700mm. This was a fairly precise measurement and it's safest to allow a bit more slack. Each structure will vary, so measure over the top from front to back and from side to side. Allow extra length for rolling round timbers to hold the polythene down. Excess polythene can be cut off, but if it's too short, it can't be stretched.

Roll one of the 1670mm battens into the polythene at each side of the frame. Aim to stretch the polythene tight and the rolled bits should sit on the ground. Use pipe clips, fitted from the inside of the structure, to hold these wrapped timbers tight against the hoops. It helps to have another person stand on the wrapped timber to stretch the polythene while you fit the clips. Make sure the polythene is distributed correctly to the front and back of the frame.

Fold the polythene round the front of the frame. Use a fixing block to screw into the batten and hold the polythene in place. Repeat so all four front ends of the lower battens are fixed in this way.

## STEP 8: FITTING THE DOOR RAIL

Roll the top, front edge of the polythene round one of the 1710mm lengths of wood. Use 5mm x 70mm screws to fix into the ends of the top two side battens to make a door rail.

## STEP 9: FITTING POLYTHENE CLIPS

Use the clips made at step 5 to tidy up the edge of polythene round the open door of the frame. Aim for a neat finish with no flapping ends of polythene. There is no need to use clips across the top part of the hoop.

## STEP 10: FITTING THE BACK

Gather the polythene neatly at the back of the frame and wrap it around a 1710mm piece of wood. I screwed this on to the wooden side of the raised bed to give more rigidity. It could equally have been fixed to the fence, or sandwiched between lengths of timber, as for the sides, and weighted down with heavy stones.



## STEP 11: MAKING THE DOOR

Cut a piece of polythene wide enough to cover the front opening with 10cm overlap to each side. Roll the lower edge around a 1710mm piece of timber and use a 2mm thick piece of the same length to sandwich the polythene in place. Use 4mm x 40mm screws to screw these pieces together.

Let the lower edge rest on the ground and lift the top edge up to the door rail. Wind surplus polythene round a 2mm thick, 1710mm length of timber and use the same sandwiching technique to screw it in place against the door rail.



The door should hang neatly from the top rail when finished.

## STEP 12: DOOR CATCHES

You can make a fancier catch if you want, but a bit of strong twine works perfectly well to hold the door open.

## STEP 13: THE FINISHED MINI-GREENHOUSE

Lay a board, paving or tiles up the centre of the greenhouse so you don't tread on the soil. This makes it easier to plant and tend the beds. Enjoy the space and start planting! ■



# GROWING GUIDES

WEBSITES AND BLOGS FOR ALLOTMENT GARDENERS BY TONY FLANAGAN

## Fusian Living

[www.fusianliving.com](http://www.fusianliving.com)

The creator of this site, Jo Jo Yee, was one of the finalists on The Big Allotment Challenge 2014; but this food and gardening blog has been active long before that, since 2010 in fact.

There is plenty of advice on growing all kinds of vegetables, herbs and fruits, including a section on Asian/Chinese vegetables. Alongside entries on carrots, there are pieces on kai lan/Chinese broccoli, pak choi and tatsoi. In the growing sections, Jo Jo shows what can



be produced from a small garden combined with container planting.

Because it's a blog, the entries are based on everyday experiences. The recipes draw on Malaysian and Chinese cooking to provide imaginative and exciting dishes, but also international cuisine more widely, for

example her Lebanese Baba Ghanouj (Aubergine Dip). There are recipes for main meals, salads, light meals and side dishes. And how about this for a dish? Quinoa, tofu, wakame seaweed in egg drop broth!



## The Horticultural Channel

[www.thehorticulturalchannel.tv](http://www.thehorticulturalchannel.tv)

The Horticultural Channel, brainchild of Sean James Cameron, provides weekly videos produced by amateur gardeners for amateur gardeners.

There is a good deal of practical advice for anyone interested in gardening, allotments, growing their own fruit, herbs, vegetables and flowers and attracting wildlife to their plots. The videos are presented by Sean himself but you do meet his allotment friends encountering the same day to day problems that most experience. There are specific 'how to' videos such as 'how to sow tomatoes', news items and competitions. Videos are uploaded every Friday and specific growing guides every Wednesday.

The Horticultural Channel reaches over 10,000 subscribers, the most subscribed to YouTube gardening channel in Europe. Subscription is free.



## Growveg.com Garden Planner

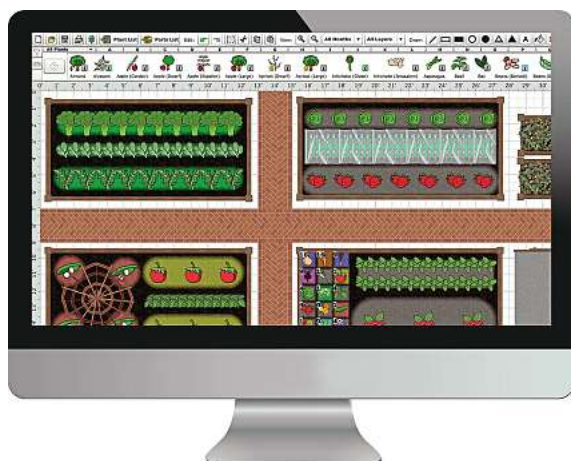
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If you want some help with organising your plot, then GrowVeg.com may help with its online Garden Planner.

No matter the size or shape of your plot, this piece of software is designed to help you decide what to plant where. Your planning is done on a grid to which you can add ready-designed objects such as greenhouses, pathways, ponds and raised beds. For oddly shaped gardens, lines can be drawn to match irregular borders. To populate your plot,

you can choose from a database of over 200 vegetables, herbs and fruit. Plants are added to the plot using drag and drop with the icons accompanied by spacing recommendations and how many plants will fit into the area.

Detailed growing information is also available per plant and there is a succession planting feature so you can organise what crops will follow on from another. Garden Planner also provides automatic crop rotation guidance based on what you have previously grown in a particular spot. Annual subscription comes in at a reasonable £15.



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# Resistance is fertile

Gaby Bartai visits Grow Heathrow, where opposition to the proposed third runway has taken root

**I**f you were following the headlines on August 15 last year, you might remember pictures of some 200 people gathered to defend a community garden in West London.

It's not often that a garden makes the national news but this one was pitted against government and corporate interests; growing on ground which was to have been tarmacked for Heathrow's third runway.

Four and a half years earlier, on March 1, 2010, a group of environmental activists from Transition Heathrow had taken over the site of an abandoned market garden in Sipson, one of the villages threatened with demolition to make way for the proposed new runway. Since food growing is a key part of more traditional Transition Towns, they decided to incorporate that into a squatted community space. ➤

**MAIN IMAGE:** Only a year after Grow Heathrow took over the site, it had been transformed into a thriving community food garden Picture: Grow Heathrow







## GET GROWING

Working from month to month, without any idea of how long they might be able to stay, they started to transform the site, clearing away 30 tonnes of rubbish, reglazing its three large greenhouses, building a raised bed garden and creating the infrastructure necessary for a resident community. Gradually they expanded on to an adjacent, larger piece of derelict land, which they call the Backlands.

The initial impulse for the project was anti-aviation rather than pro-gardening, but the two quickly melded. "We realised that if we wanted to be serious about resisting a runway being built here, we had to have a long-term presence in the local community, and have a physical space to defend," says Pete Moss, who's been involved since the beginning. "The whole idea was that we didn't want to engage with this mode of activism where we're constantly just saying 'no' to things. We wanted to present a positive, like a double-edged thing: 'Don't do this, but do do this.' So, grow food locally, distribute it locally, produce all our energy from renewables, build houses out of natural materials and all this kind of stuff."

Resistance to the runway meshed with the issue of land justice. "It's really hard to find a space to grow within the city," says Pete, an experienced gardener who has been involved with a range of food-growing projects. From an anti-capitalist standpoint, squatting derelict land in order to create a community garden is an entirely legitimate thing to do. But there's more: this is not just any brownfield site. The Heathrow area is Grade I agricultural land. Grow Heathrow's greenhouses used to produce grapes and tomatoes for the population of London. "Back in the 1920s, they used to go into Covent Garden with trailers full of fruit and veg and come back with trailers full of horse manure... a beautiful system," says Pete. "This was the countryside."

Heathrow only dates back to the Second World War, when it was a military airfield. Then, after the war, it was converted to commercial use and the insidious process of expansion began. "It's swallowing up some of the best farmland in the country. And it just seems like suicide to be tarmacking over amazing agricultural soil when it's so close to such a big population. And it had that history, of feeding the population of London."



Picture: Grow Heathrow

**ABOVE:** This was how the site looked when the protestors first arrived: the greenhouses were missing 70% of glass and were knee-deep in rubbish

**RIGHT:** Grow Heathrow campaigners Pete Moss and Eddy Charles

**BELOW:** Companion planting is a key principle in the raised bed garden



Picture: Jonathan Goldberg



## GROWING COMMUNITY

The project set out to restore the site to its function as a market garden – but because the greenhouses now also accommodate kitchen, living and workshop space, and the area of the outdoor beds is quite small, self-sufficiency isn't an option. "We do grow a good amount of food, but we don't have the space on this site to grow enough to support a resident community of 15, 20 people, seven days a week, with events of 100 people coming here," says Pete. They anyway have a ready – if ironic – source of bulk quantities of fruit and veg as they are able to access cosmetically damaged rejects from crops air-freighted into Heathrow. They've therefore chosen to concentrate on growing more unusual crops. "Stuff like oca and mashua and different tubers, unusual squashes and cucumbers, amazing things like black tomatoes. We've had pretty good crops of tomatoes, chillies; we do quite a lot of salad."

One of their challenges is the perennial one on reclaimed urban sites: soil pollution. Part of the site was formerly a car breaking yard. They've put their outdoor beds on the least contentious area, which was basically a car park, but still didn't want to risk planting straight into the soil. They have therefore made raised beds, which they've built up with a deep layer of wood chips. This is topped with compost into which they mix the charcoal produced by their wood burners. They use stock-free organic cultivation techniques, so they make extensive use of green manures, ➤





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Picture: Jonathan Goldberg



**ABOVE:** Early-season seed sowing

undersowing their crops with fertility builders like clover, trefoil and vetch.

Everybody who lives on site has some degree of responsibility for the garden – though that, says Pete, can have its challenges. Grow Heathrow defines itself as an anti-hierarchical space, which means that all decisions are made collectively. It's easy to make group decisions about things like growing methods, he says, "but it's more interesting when it comes down to the day to day stuff." So how do they make sure that the watering gets done when nobody is in charge? "It's a work in progress. We increasingly assign roles that rotate. When it's everyone's responsibility, sometimes things can get blurred. If this was scaled up to a bigger community with more permanence around it, I guess the group structure would have people whose main role was as a food grower. But this space is a bit more free-form than that. So everyone has to muck in and do what's required."

**BELOW:** Sharing skills with young gardeners



Picture: Grow Heathrow

**"EVERYONE HAS TO MUCK IN AND DO WHAT'S REQUIRED"**

The make-up of the resident community has varied over the history of the project. "There's a flux of people coming and going. Visitors from around London, around the UK and around the world who have heard about the project or are from other eco-communities," says Eddy

Charles, who has been a resident for the past year. Some people stay for a few weeks and then move on to other projects, while others make it their home. Some, like Eddy, combine their role on site with part-time jobs in the city; he's a teaching assistant. Pete, who was a resident for four years, now divides his time between Grow Heathrow and other sustainable growing projects.

The project draws activists who come in support of the anti-aviation politics and do some gardening while they're there – but it also draws local people who just want to get involved in growing. "There are regulars who wouldn't subscribe to any kind of anti-capitalist politics but are just gardeners who come and help out," says Eddy. Unusually for a squatted project, it has extremely strong support from the local community.

"This garden has been a space for healing," says Eddy. "It's a relaxing, resting space for lots of people, for anyone in the Heathrow area, to come and spend some time and make it their own. In this part of London, where you have the M4 and the M25 and the airport, with concrete everywhere... we're told it's one of the most polluted airspaces in the country, so any kind of green space needs to stay, needs to be preserved."

## SHARING SKILLS

It's not just that self-sufficiency isn't currently possible for Grow Heathrow, given the space, the numbers and the impossibility of long-term planning; it's also not the point of the project. "We're trying to be as outward-facing as possible," says Pete. Their aim is to demonstrate how sustainable living could be achieved, and to share the necessary skills with as many other people as possible, especially kids. "Those who live in the city and have no real concept of what vegetables are have the chance to pick tomatoes, and that is more important than us being able to say we are 100% self-sufficient in tomatoes."

Picture: Grow Heathrow







Picture: Jonathan Goldberg



**LEFT:** Sorting and storing the apple harvest

**ABOVE:** Preparing the raised beds for a new season

**RIGHT:** Watering duty at the height of summer



Picture: Jonathan Goldberg



Picture: Jonathan Goldberg

"One of the main functions of this space is to have community events," says Eddy. "It's just a fantastic learning space for people getting back in touch with nature. I'm a rookie gardener, only of a year. And this has been tremendous in my own personal development as a gardener." The project aims to equip people with the practical skills that build self-reliance and community resilience, like organic food-growing, permaculture design, bicycle maintenance, woodwork and metalwork. "We have Growing Sundays where we get more experienced growers to work with people who haven't grown stuff before. That skill-share ethos runs through the site," says Pete. The project is open to the public seven days a week, and anyone is welcome to come along, help, learn and contribute.

"We're trying to represent what we think this society's priorities should be in a time of economic meltdown, climate change, biodiversity loss," says Pete. "These should be our priorities now, to invest our time and energy and money into growing our own food, developing local food markets, promoting renewable energy technology. We should be educating people on how to grow vegetables as a priority, rather than, you know, how to create adverts."

"I think this kind of prefigurative politics, where you try and create the world you want to see, is becoming much more widespread," says Eddy. "That's what enticed me about this. This is a politics of education, whether it's growing food or renewable energy or eco-building." "Education is more like skill-share," says Pete. "We don't have all the answers."

The site is almost entirely off-grid. Electricity is supplied by solar panels and a wind turbine. The site does have mains water but rainwater is harvested off the greenhouse roofs for watering, and there are compost toilets. The heating and hot water systems use waste wood, donated, like the wood chips for the garden, by a tree surgeon. Out on the Backlands are around 15 homes constructed by residents over the years on a variety of eco-friendly building principles using reclaimed local materials.

## CULTIVATING HOPE

The whole project is an inspirational testament to the triumph of hope because everything it has achieved has been done against a backdrop of uncertainty. At no point have the gardeners been able to plant crops knowing that

they'd still be there to harvest them. The landowner, a local businessman, started court proceedings within weeks of the original occupation of the site. The long, convoluted legal process came to a head in August 2014 when the residents were served with an eviction notice. It looked like time had finally run out for Grow Heathrow.

But against all the odds, the garden is still there. The day the bailiffs were due to arrive, some 200 supporters converged on the site and the bailiffs thought better of attempting an eviction that day. They could, however, now appear without warning at any time, so the residents have to be in a constant state of readiness, and their supporters are permanently on call. The project has widespread support across a whole range of demographics. "We have ➤

**ABOVE:** The restored greenhouses provide workshop and living space as well as space for growing





Picture: Grow Heathrow



Picture: Jonathan Goldberg

people from the local community, people who are environmental activists, people from other community food-growing projects, the local MP, our councillors, lots of different people..." says Pete.

At the moment, there's a sense of being in limbo, he says. They are living under the threat of imminent eviction – but it's a threat that is deferred from day to day. At the time of writing, it's been five months since the eviction notice, and there's still been no sign of the bailiffs. Then there's the fact that nobody knows where the third runway might actually be built – on top of Sipson, right next door, some distance away, at Gatwick, somewhere else entirely, or, in the campaigners' best-case scenario, nowhere at all. The Sipson proposal has, in theory, been shelved – that plan was cancelled after the 2010 election – but the threat to the village has not gone away. One of the current proposals would require the demolition of nearby Harmondsworth and put Sipson right on the end of the new runway, probably rendering it unlivable.

"Until they put their cards on the table there's not really much more we can do. But we're here now, we're holding our space, we are ready to react," says Pete. He'd like to see sister projects at all the other threatened sites. "We should occupy spaces in all of those places, and be more ambitious and grow more food and build positive representations of the future as an alternative to this crazy, greedy mentality that we have at the moment."

Although they are coming from an anti-capitalist standpoint, the campaigners are open to the idea of buying or leasing the land – and the widespread support for the project means that crowd-funding would now be an option. That would seem an obvious solution for the owner, given that there's no point in him developing the land while its future remains in the balance – but so far he's refusing to negotiate. Grow Heathrow's hope is that the cost and difficulty of pursuing an eviction will eventually persuade him to come to terms. Meanwhile, they've been in separate negotiations with the owners of the Backlands. They were initially hopeful of being able to hold on to at least part of that site – but the latest news is that it is also now subject to court proceedings.

The dream is to somehow be able to retain both sites, the original core site and the larger hinterland. With security of tenure and access to more land, Grow Heathrow could develop an urban community farm. "We could plan for the future. We've imagined what this place could be, a beautiful oasis in the concrete. Growing loads of food, houses built out of straw bales, hemp, whatever, a completely autonomous community. It's all possible," says Pete.

All being well, the campaigners will be celebrating their fifth anniversary on the site as you read this. After that, bailiffs permitting, there will be a new growing season to embark upon, working from day to day in the hope that a way can be found for Grow Heathrow to survive. Gardening is always an investment in the future – but never more than here. ■

**TOP LEFT:** Built almost entirely from reclaimed local materials, the straw bale house provides a workshop and meeting space

**ABOVE:** Winter in the raised bed garden

**RIGHT:** The office, beside the raised bed garden, is used for meetings, film screenings, workshops, and as a reading and work space



Picture: Grow Heathrow



Picture: Jonathan Goldberg

**ABOVE:** The site's kitchen is housed in the end of one of the greenhouses

## FIND OUT MORE:

■ Grow Heathrow, Vineries Close, Sipson, West Drayton UB7 0JH.

■ [www.transitionheathrow.com](http://www.transitionheathrow.com)

Grow Heathrow is open to visitors every day; see the website for opening times, directions, events and details of how to get involved.



# Kitchen Garden

Down-to-earth advice for growing fruit and veg

TURN TO  
PAGES 32-33...

**A KITCHEN GARDEN  
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3RD

## KG PASSIONATE PLOTTER COMPETITION

# A place to escape

Third place in our Passionate Plotter competition goes to Linda Whinney from Norwich in Norfolk

## LINDA'S PLOT

### DO YOU TEND YOUR PLOT ON YOUR OWN?

I tend my plot alone, although my scarecrow helps deter unwanted visitors.

### DO YOU HAVE AN ALLOTMENT OR VEG PLOT IN YOUR GARDEN?

I have an allotment of 250m<sup>2</sup>.

### HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN GROWING VEG?

Three years.

### WHAT VEG CAN YOU RECOMMEND TO OTHER KITCHEN GARDENERS?

I recommend early maincrop potato 'Lady Balfour'. It has given me huge yields with large clean tubers. It stores very well and is a good all rounder in the kitchen.

I can also recommend tomato 'Cristal' – an excellent flavour, especially when cut in half, seasoned and sprinkled with mixed herbs and baked in the oven for 30 minutes.

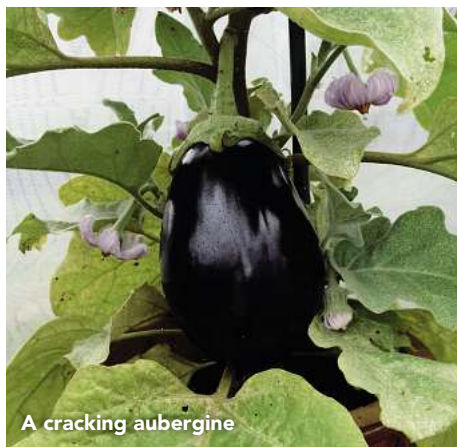
### DO YOU GROW ANY VEG IN CONTAINERS?

I have grown strawberry 'Vibrant'. I have planted three plants in each of two reusable growing bags which were filled with 100 litres of good quality compost. These were placed on the staging in my greenhouse and watered regularly, which gave me very early strawberries with a superb flavour.

I planted these out into my plot in early August after the early crop had finished fruiting. I now have a second crop of strawberries ripening.

### HOW DO YOU GROW ONE PARTICULAR CROP FROM SOWING TO HARVEST?

I purchased a greenhouse 12 x 8ft last year which was erected in April 2014. The aim was to grow more tender veg such as aubergines. I grew aubergine 'Galine'. I planted three seeds in a 3in pot in seed and potting compost in March. I started these off in my conservatory until they were 2in high when I potted them on to a 3in pot each. I chose the best six plants and planted them directly into



A cracking aubergine





This scary scarecrow will scare everything away!

"I WOULD HIGHLY RECOMMEND AN ALLOTMENT TO ANYONE FEELING THE PRESSURES OF MODERN DAY LIFE"



A trug of veg



the ground in the greenhouse in May. Later the same month I read that aubergines do better in pots. I had three straggly, substandard plants left so I planted each one in a 10in pot. I had no fruit from the plants in the ground in the greenhouse. The ones planted in pots gave me four to five good-sized fruits from each plant. These did require copious amounts of water as the fruits set but the end result was well worth the effort. Next year all aubergines will be grown in pots.

#### WHY ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT YOUR PLOT?

I acquired my plot in September 2011 and not long afterwards I started to suffer from work-related stress which resulted in having six months off work during 2012. My plot ►



Some homemade chutney



Tomatoes are lovely baked in the oven



## Linda wins a Garden Mall Parasene High Top Electric Propagator



The Parasene electric propagator will soon be winging its way to Linda. The 60W propagator is thermostatically controlled so will cut off when the correct temperature has been reached. Ideal for young tender veg.

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### GARDEN MALL

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became one of my main therapies. My counsellor recommended leaving the house every day for fresh air and exercise and my allotment gave me a sanctuary from the hurly-burly of everyday life. I found it very tranquil and hugely rewarding watching the neglected site taking shape and producing enough produce for myself and friends and family as well.

I was eventually well enough to return to work but I still spend as much time as I can spare working my plot. I would highly recommend an allotment to anyone feeling the

pressures of modern-day life. Not only does it concentrate the mind, it also gives you fresh air and exercise, excellent fresh produce and introduces you to a whole new set of like-minded people. I have also started making jams, preserves and chutneys from excess produce for my friends and family to try, and they give me feedback on which are best so that I can make the most popular in the years to come.

Acquiring my allotment has given me a new zest for life and digging is better than any diet for losing weight. ■



A general view of the plot



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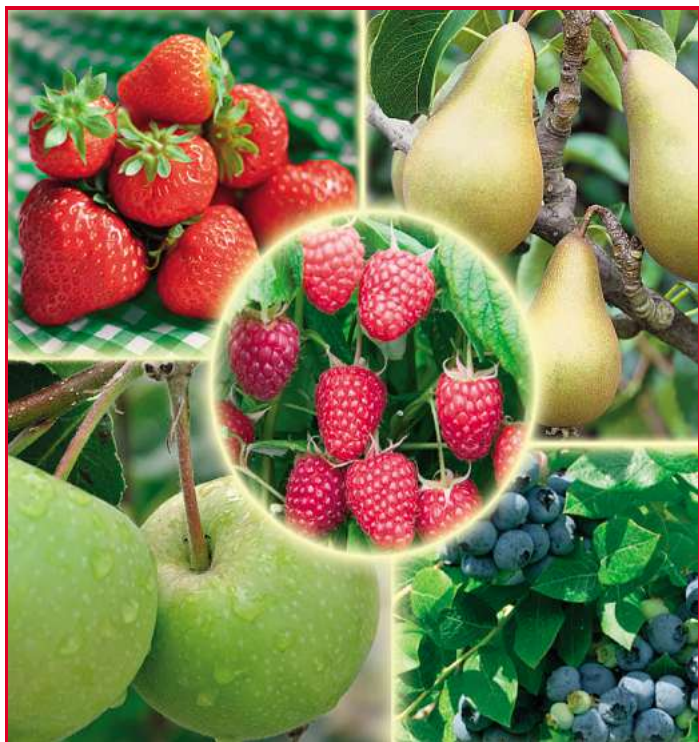
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## NEW PLANTERS

Stewart Garden has added Moroccan planters to its decorative range and is also expanding its Essential planters collection. The new planter ranges are made from high quality plastics, so they're strong, durable and resistant to harsh weather.

The Moroccan planters have a circular ribbed design and are available in granite and sandstone colours. Moroccan-style products give gardens an exotic finish and a touch of Middle Eastern luxurious chic. New additions to the popular Stewart Garden Essential planters range are available in mocha, cherry and light blue.

Price: Moroccan planters 38 x 40cm (15 x 16in) suggested retail price £19.99.  
Essential planters SRP £3.99 (Size 33cm/13in); SRP £4.99 (size 39cm/15in)  
[www.stewart-garden.co.uk](http://www.stewart-garden.co.uk).



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## HERB POT

Here is a great little herb pot that is perfect for people who forget to water their plants. Plants in this smart plant pot will extract exactly the amount of water they need via an internal cotton wick inserted into the soil. A decorative flower acts as a water level indicator and rises when the plant needs watering, making this a unique and quirky way for little (or big) ones to learn the excitement and rewards of successful gardening. Available in green or white.

Price: £20  
[www.cuckooland.com](http://www.cuckooland.com)



## GROWING OUT OF THE BOX

If you are looking for a present for a child or an adult who is taking an interest in gardening, Mr Fothergill's has a great range of products which are suitable. It has just launched the GroBox – the garden in a box which will appeal to those who would love to garden but have little time.

The patented GroBox is a straightforward concept where a biodegradable cardboard box holding four varieties of pre-sown seeds in a growing medium is planted, covered and watered in the garden or in a container. There are four choices – Herbs, Salads, Children's Vegetables and Children's Flowers.

Price: RRP £6.99 available from garden centres and many other retail outlets nationwide.



## NEW GARDEN TOOL

The Culti-Mate Weeder is a great all-purpose small garden tool coming to the market. The Culti-Mate Weeder can be used for many gardening jobs. It creates seed drills, breaks up hard soil and is a delicate weeder for those difficult to reach places between plants and in between paving slabs. It can also be used to transplant, make small seed and bulb holes and is an excellent edging device. It can be used as a mud scraper for cleaning other tools. It has an injection moulded tempered steel blade with a soft grip handle for quality and ease of use.

Price: RRP of £9.99  
[www.greanbase.co.uk](http://www.greanbase.co.uk) tel 01604 530035





## MEADOW ON A MAT

Gardeners are being encouraged to grow more wild flowers to help bees and other wildlife. This is now a lot easier with an innovative landscaping product called Meadowmat by lawn-turf growers Q Lawns. Meadowmat is a wildflower meadow on a roll and is laid just like turf and is a convenient way of creating a beautiful, natural and environmentally friendly area in the garden.

This 100% natural solution is helping to halt the tragic decline in Britain's wildflower meadows that has seen more than 90% lost in the past 65 years. You could devote a small area at the end of your veg plot to a Meadowmat and enjoy the benefits of extra pollinators to your patch.

To use, prepare the soil and roll the mat in place. There are two turfs available. Birds, Bees and Butterflies is studded with up to 42 different native British wildflowers. Traditional Meadowmat has 34 different wildflower species. The traditional Meadowmat flowers from May to July and the Birds, Bees and Butterflies variety



continues to the end of September. The meadow flowers will bloom in the first summer of planting and the ideal time to lay the turf is either spring or autumn.

**Information: Meadowmat please visit:**  
<http://www.meadowmat.com> or **Q Lawns**  
 visit: <http://www qlawns.co.uk>

## JUST FIT FOR THE JOB



You may just don an old pair of jeans to garden in but gardening clothing company Genus is hoping to convince us to wear some clothing specific for the task. Their new stylish 3-Season Gardening Trousers are packed with clever features gardeners will love. They have lots of pockets including

ones for a phone and gardening gloves. And the most interesting are the two stab resistant pockets which are ideal for carrying a pair of secateurs or knife without fear of injuring yourself. These trousers even have an integrated damp proof seat panel so you never get a 'soggy bottom'. The knee area also has a breathable damp-proof pad system.

**Price: From £95 and available for men and women [www.genus.gs](http://www.genus.gs)**

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## PRODUCT REVIEW

# Sowing equipment

This month we explore some of the products that might make our sowing days that little bit easier

**A**pril is usually the month when we all get down to some serious sowing. As usual this will involve preparing seed beds and pots, sowing the seed, and checking conditions are right for germination and growth.

Seed sowing can be a tricky affair, especially with seeds often being so small and delicate, but there are gadgets that might help. Spacing and depth are other factors so rulers and dibbers are

useful for precise sowing. Of course, it usually helps if you can grow your seeds in a straight line, so garden lines surely are a must.

When growing in seed trays and pots, tampers can help level the surface while potting riddles help give your compost a fine tilth, which seeds love. A propagation and soil thermometer is another useful implement to help you know when the right temperature for germination has been reached.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN PURCHASING

### GARDEN LINES

Garden lines are simple affairs, two posts joined together by various lengths of string or twine. The posts are usually wooden but you can get metal ones too.

### SPACING RULES

Spacing rules are a handy for getting the right distance between seeds. Measurements are in imperial and metric. Ours had a line running along the middle showing the correct distance for sowing different vegetables.

### SEEDERS

It's quite easy to over or under seed, which means you have not maximised your sowing space or you have a lot of thinning out to do. Seeders are a simple mechanism for controlling how much seed you sow and where it goes.

### DIBBERS

These are invaluable for planting bulbs as well as seeds. Either metal or wooden, dibbers usually come marked with lined gradations so you can plant to the right depth.

### TAMPERS

These are great for making sure you are sowing on a level bed and firming the seeds in. It is quite easy to think that you have a flat sowing surface.

### POTTING RIDDLES

Sometimes compost is not as refined as you would like for small seeds so a potting riddle helps to sift your compost to a tilth more amenable to seedlings as they emerge.

### SOIL THERMOMETER

With germination and with young seedlings, temperature is very important. Too cold, and your seeds won't germinate, so a thermometer is a precise way of measuring the temperature of your soil.

### PRICE

Quite a lot of sowing equipment is relatively cheap, so investing in a range of suitable sowing aids should not cost a fortune.

### SUPPLIERS

■ **BURGON & BALL**

[www.burgonandball.com](http://www.burgonandball.com)

■ **MARSHALLS**

[www.marshalls-seeds.co.uk](http://www.marshalls-seeds.co.uk)

■ **THE ORGANIC GARDENING CATALOGUE**

[www.organiccatalogue.com](http://www.organiccatalogue.com)

■ **TWOWESTS & ELLIOT**

[www.twowests.co.uk](http://www.twowests.co.uk)





### PRO-SEEDER (THE ORGANIC GARDENING CATALOGUE)

**PRODUCT CODE:** PRSE **FEATURES:** BRASS TIPPED. THREE DIFFERENT SIZED NEEDLES. TWO CLEANING STRIPS. BUILT-IN STORAGE CHAMBER. **PRICE:** £9.95

This works by sucking the seed on to the point of one of the needles and then, when in place, letting the seed drop into the cell. It needed a little practice but overall it was effective.

#### KG VERDICT

Quite useful for precision sowing

#### PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

#### EASE OF USE

★★★★★

#### OVERALL

★★★★★

#### KG VERDICT

Useful accessory to give seeds a good starting point

#### PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

#### EASE OF USE

★★★★★

#### OVERALL

★★★★★

### ROUND POT TAMPER (BURGON & BALL)

**PRODUCT CODE:** GYO/RTAM **FEATURES:** Hand crafted out of FSC beech wood. Base diameter 8cm (3in). **PRICE:** £6.95

The beech wood makes this an attractive product. Very effective in tamping down compost in the pot to create a level sowing surface.



### POTTING RIDDLE (BURGON & BALL)

**PRODUCT CODE:** GYO/RDW **FEATURES:** 4MM GALVANISED MESH WITH PLYWOOD RIM. **PRICE:** £12.95

It's easy to over cover seeds and thereby give the emerging seedlings too much work to do. This riddle is very effective in preventing this, providing a light covering perfect for smaller seeds.

#### KG VERDICT

Great accessory for giving a light covering to seeds

#### PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

#### EASE OF USE

★★★★★

#### OVERALL

★★★★★

#### KG VERDICT

Variable effectiveness

#### PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

#### EASE OF USE

★★★★★

#### OVERALL

★★★★★

### MAGIC SEEDER (TWOWESTS & ELLIOT)

**PRODUCT CODE:** MAS **FEATURES:** SPRING LOADED PLUNGER TO DISPENSE SEEDS OF A WIDE RANGE OF SIZES UP TO 2MM. **PRICE:** £4.99

This is a promising little seeder but getting the bottom off to load the seeds into the container was difficult. The spring mechanism for pumping out the seeds was not as consistent as it could have been. ➤







## VEGETABLE SEED GROWING GUIDE-PLANTING WHEEL (MARSHALLS)

**PRODUCT CODE:** GRH/SETPASS 1090-3515  
**FEATURES:** STRONG PLASTIC CONSTRUCTION. WIPE CLEAN SURFACE. **PRICE:** £5.25

This is a handy growing guide which covers 40 vegetables. A simple turn of the wheel to the vegetable of your choice and the gap will give you information about when to sow under cover or outside, when to plant outside, transplant and harvest. At the same time, windows will reveal sowing depth, space between rows and space between plants, all in metric, for that specific plant. Metric measurements might be a drawback to some but there is a conversion chart on the back.

### KG VERDICT

Simple to use, compact reference guide

### PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

### EASE OF USE

★★★★★

### OVERALL

★★★★★

### KG VERDICT

Very handy accessory

### PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

### EASE OF USE

★★★★★

### OVERALL

★★★★★

## SEED TRAY TAMPER (BURGON & BALL)

**PRODUCT CODE:** GES/TRAYTAMP **FEATURES:** 8CM (3IN) SQUARE, FSC CERTIFIED BEECH WOOD. **PRICE:** £6.95

This worked very well, pressing the compost down in the seed tray very effectively. Too often what we think is level, isn't, so this brings a consistently level surface to our seed tray compost.



## SEED AND PLANT SPACING RULE (BURGON & BALL, THE ORGANIC GARDENING CATALOGUE)

**PRODUCT CODE:** GYO/PRULE **FEATURES:** SEED SOWING HOLES, METRIC AND IMPERIAL GRADUATIONS, PLUS PRINTED VEGETABLE SPACING GUIDE. PRECISION MACHINED FROM FSC BEECH WOOD. OVERALL LENGTH 1M. **PRICE:** £18.95 (BURGON & BALL), £18.55 (THE ORGANIC GARDENING CATALOGUE)

This is a very helpful accessory for careful seed sowing, though make sure the dibber you use with it is sufficiently narrow (the holes are 1cm in diameter). For those who prefer metric to imperial measurements (or vice versa) there are gradations for both. Along the rule there are reminders of recommended spacings for sowing distances per vegetable, which is helpful.

### KG VERDICT

Handy accessory for precision sowing

### PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

### EASE OF USE

★★★★★

### OVERALL

★★★★★



**DON'T MISS OUR MONEY-SAVING OFFERS @ [www.kitchengardenshop.co.uk](http://www.kitchengardenshop.co.uk)**



**KG VERDICT**

Both dibbers  
practical accessories

**PERFORMANCE**

★★★★★

**EASE OF USE**

★★★★★

**OVERALL**

★★★★★

**BEECH GARDEN DIBBER**  
(TOWESTS & ELLIOT)

**PRODUCT CODE:** BGDND **FEATURES:** HANDMADE FROM BEECH. MARKED INTO 2.5CM (1IN) SEGMENTS.  
**PRICE:** £3.65

This dibber is a handy accessory for accurate sowing, especially for larger seeds such as peas or beans, garlic cloves and onion sets. The marked gradations allow you to judge the accurate depth required for each type of seed.

**BEECH POT DIBBER**  
(TOWESTS & ELLIOT)

**PRODUCT CODE:** BPOTD **FEATURES:** HANDMADE FROM BEECH. **PRICE:** £1.50

This is a useful tool for planting seeds in pots, seed trays and plug trays. Quite handy too for lifting and transplanting seedlings.

**TEAM'S CHOICE**  
BEST FOR  
PLANTING  
LARGER  
SEEDS IN  
CELLS

**GARDEN LINE**  
(MARSHALLS)

**PRODUCT CODE:** 1090-3567 **FEATURES:** 28CM (11IN) OAK POSTS MADE FROM MANAGED FSC TIMBER. 20M (22YDS) OF NATURAL JUTE TWINE. **PRICE:** £9.95

This is a nice looking product and the solid, oak posts are made to last whatever the weather. This garden line comes with plenty of twine so is suitable for large plots as well as smaller ones. Because the posts are quite thick, you will need to make sure that the soil has been loosened up a little first before you push them down – no problem on a new seed bed.

**KG VERDICT**

Durable and  
versatile

**PERFORMANCE**

★★★★★

**EASE OF USE**

★★★★★

**OVERALL**

★★★★★

**KG VERDICT**

Useful for sowing  
into drills

**PERFORMANCE**

★★★★★

**EASE OF USE**

★★★★★

**OVERALL**

★★★★★

**SEED SOWER**  
(TOWESTS & ELLIOT)

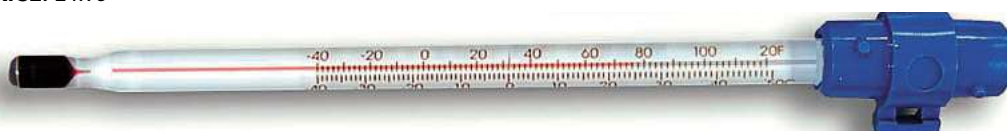
**PRODUCT CODE:** BPSS **FEATURES:** TRANSPARENT, ROTATING BEZEL ALLOWS YOU TO SOW SEEDS FROM 1MM UP TO 10MM IN DIAMETER. **PRICE:** £1.99

Quite a simple device that you can adjust depending on the size of seed you are sowing. The top is very secure, but maybe a bit too much so as it is quite difficult to take off and the rotating bezel can be a little difficult to turn. However, the seeds did come out in a more staggered fashion than you would probably achieve hand-sowing.

**PROPAGATION AND SOIL THERMOMETER**  
(TOWESTS & ELLIOT)

**PRODUCT CODE:** GYO/RDW **FEATURES:** CAN BE USED DIRECTLY IN SOIL, COMPOST, MUSHROOM AND HEATED SEED BEDS. DISPLAYS TEMPERATURE IN BOTH DEGREES CENTIGRADE & FAHRENHEIT. RANGE -30 TO +50°C (-20 TO +120°F). 15CM (6IN) LONG. **PRICE:** £4.95

With our weather in the UK being so variable, it's good to keep an eye on soil temperatures, especially with seeds and young seedlings. This neat little pen-like thermometer does the trick nicely. Keep it in your top pocket and have it at the ready. ■

**KG VERDICT**

With this you don't  
need to take  
chances with seeds,  
and seedlings

**PERFORMANCE**

★★★★★

**EASE OF USE**

★★★★★

**OVERALL**

★★★★★



# GIVEAWAYS

WORTH  
OVER  
**£3383**

TO ENTER OUR GIVEAWAYS SEE PAGE 104 OR VISIT THE KG WEBSITE

## BUILD YOUR GARDEN, BLOCK BY BLOCK!

Remember the fun of playing with building blocks? WoodBlocX is an ingenious product for garden landscaping which could restore your faith in DIY. It promises to make child's play of building raised beds and planters, terracing and retaining walls, ponds, decking, greenhouse bases, seats, kerbing or whatever else you can imagine for your garden, in any size or shape you need.

The average WoodBlocX project can be constructed in a few hours, and the end result is a high-quality structure, guaranteed for 20 years, which is a beautiful addition to any garden. WoodBlocX is light, easy to carry and simple to work with. The pieces are pre-drilled and to put them together you only need a hammer and a couple of other household tools. Using WoodBlocX to make structures like raised beds is far easier than struggling with planks or railway sleepers, and it's also much more attractive, with a pleasing natural appearance which can be painted if you wish.

WoodBlocX is a modular system based on pre-cut timber blocks. These fit together using large plastic dowels which have a patented locking action. This means that your construction will form one large rigid structure with many connections to hold it together. Your retaining wall will



not fail; your raised pond will not collapse; your raised beds will stay straight, neat and strong.

WoodBlocX structures need no foundations and will not crack or break with ground movement or frost. It has more strength than masonry in some situations because it can withstand tension forces as well as compression. The strong overlapped corner joints require no nails or screws, and bevelled capping gives an elegant finish to the whole job.

The BlocX are made in the UK from sustainably grown pine. This is quarter-sawn (avoiding the centre of the tree to minimise distortion and cracking) and pressure-treated twice during the

manufacturing process. This ensures full penetration of the preservative through the wood and gives a service life of over 20 years in contact with the ground. Better still, it's all approved organic by the Soil Association.

The flexibility of WoodBlocX means that you can create any size or style of construction to suit your garden. A whole range of kits are available or you can create your own design. The website includes a calculator which will work out the components required for any given dimensions, or you can call on the expertise of the WoodBlocX team, who offer a free design service. Your tailored

construction pack will include layer-by-layer building instructions.

WoodBlocX probably costs less than you think, with prices starting at £89 – and the company is making a bonus offer to KG readers. Place any order online before April 30, 2015, quoting code 'KGApril' and you'll get a 5% discount.

For more information, call 0800 389 1420 or visit [www.woodblocx.co.uk](http://www.woodblocx.co.uk)

We have one £1000 WoodBlocX voucher to give away.

**WOOD**  
**BlocX**



TO ENTER GO TO [WWW.KITCHENGARDEN.CO.UK/COMPETITIONS](http://WWW.KITCHENGARDEN.CO.UK/COMPETITIONS) OR



## PETS WIN PRIZES

Every dog needs something to cuddle up to, and with the Scruffs Snuggle Pet Blanket you can be sure yours has the very best.

This easy-to-clean double-sided blanket has a soft plush side and a cooler faux suede side. It is filled with polyester, which means that whichever way round your pet uses it they are assured of a comfortable bed.

Caring for your Snuggle Pet Blanket is easy, as the whole thing can be popped in the washing machine, so your dog always has a clean, inviting bed. This sumptuous blanket is

perfect for covering up your dog on colder evenings or using as a sleeping spot on its own. It comes in a choice of three colours: burgundy, chocolate and navy.

Established in 2005, Scruffs is now the fastest-growing pet bed manufacturer in the UK, offering a wide range of luxurious bedding and accessories for dogs and cats. Its pet bed range includes mattresses, pillows, donuts and box-beds and utility, oval, soft-walled, igloo and tepee designs.

To browse and buy online, visit [www.petslovescruffs.com](http://www.petslovescruffs.com)

We have 12 Snuggle Pet Blankets worth £19.99 to give away.

Snuggle  
Pet Blanket

12  
TO GIVE  
AWAY



## DRAGONFLI CELEBRATES FIVE YEARS

Natural gardening company Dragonfli is celebrating its fifth anniversary with the relaunch of two of its most popular products.

The company is best known for its live Beepol bumblebee hives, and last year saw the launch of the Beepol Villa, a new larger system. The villa is made from cedar, and the company has now added a copper roof for an extra touch of style. It comes with a large hive voucher, which you return to receive a live bee colony in season (April to July). The lodge has a viewing panel so you can watch your colony develop.

Dragonfli has also relaunched its bestselling biostimulant



Roots Boost, which contains 18 species of mycorrhizal fungi to promote root growth and help plants take up more water and nutrients. Roots Boost is especially effective with bare-root trees, roses and shrubs. It now comes in a resealable pouch in three sizes: 60g, 250g and 500g.

To find out more about Dragonfli's wildlife gardening and plant care products, visit [www.dragonfli.co.uk](http://www.dragonfli.co.uk) or call 01284 830400.

We have one Beepol Villa with a large hive voucher worth £195, plus 30 60g sachets of Roots Boost worth £3.95, to give away.



1  
TO GIVE  
AWAY



30  
TO GIVE  
AWAY

## BRIDGE THE FRUIT GAP WITH BLUEBERRIES

Fruit breeder Lubera has already introduced over 80 new varieties to the market, and its extensive breeding programme means that there's no end in sight. The majority of its breeding takes place at its headquarters in the

Rhine Valley in Switzerland, so you can be sure of getting hardy and resistant varieties.

The company currently has around 15 breeding projects on the go, including raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, blueberries, gooseberries, fourberries, apples, pears, cherries and plum/prunus hybrids. Lubera breeds with the needs of gardeners in mind, rather than for commercial growers, and its aim is to produce easier-to-grow, more resistant, better, unique and different varieties.

This month 10 KG readers have the chance to win two

Lubera-bred blueberry varieties, selected to offer a successional harvest across the 'fruit gap' in mid to late summer. 'Blue Roma', claimed to have the best flavour yet, produces its large fruits in August. 'Buddy Blue', which is the latest-ripening variety, has large sweet fruits and ripens in September and October. Lubera blueberries are supplied as strong shrubs in five-litre pots.

See Lubera's full range at [www.lubera.co.uk](http://www.lubera.co.uk)

We have 10 pairs of blueberry plants, one 'Blue Roma' and one 'Buddy Blue', worth a total of £33.30, to give away. ➤



10  
TO GIVE  
AWAY

Lubera  
fruitful gardening

YOU CAN FILL IN YOUR DETAILS ON THE GIVEAWAYS FORM – PAGE 104



## GET SET FOR SPRING WITH NEUDORFF

Neudorff's organic feeds and weed and pest control products use natural active ingredients that have as little impact on the environment as possible, helping to protect birds, bees, worms and other beneficial garden visitors while tackling pests, fighting weeds and fertilising plants.

The range includes slug, snail, bug and ant killers, weed and moss controls, lawn, plant and vegetable feeds and composting products, all of which utilise Neudorff's 160 years of experience and offer exceptional results.

We have 10 prize packages worth £30.45 to give away, each containing five products.

Sluggo is an effective slug and snail killer which leaves no trace of



**10  
TO GIVE  
AWAY**

slime or dead pests. SuperFast Weed Killer is a herbicide offering lasting results across a wide variety of annual and perennial weeds. Bug & Larvae Killer features a powerful active ingredient which controls aphids, lily beetle, red spider mite,

greenfly and many other pests.

New for 2015, Mycorrhiza Root Enlarger encourages vigorous growth while making plants more resilient to frost, drought and unfavourable pH levels. Organic Lawn Feed & Improver features mycorrhiza to promote root growth,

with added microorganisms helping you to achieve a thick, green and weed-free lawn. For more information visit [www.neudorff.co.uk](http://www.neudorff.co.uk)

**We have 10 Neudorff prize packages worth £30.45 to give away.**

## SHARPEN UP YOUR KITCHENWARE

Milly's Store sells a huge range of designer kitchenware at budget prices, with a price-promise guarantee. The company is giving KG readers the chance to win an exclusive Global Knives 30th Anniversary Six Piece Knife Block Set, which has an RRP of £749.99 but is on offer from Milly's Store for £299.99.

Global Knives are made from the finest high-carbon stainless steel, utilising a unique molybdenum/vanadium alloy. The blades are ice-tempered and hardened to Rockwell C 56-58, ensuring that they hold an acute cutting edge while being robust and stain-resistant.

**We have one Six Piece Knife Block Set worth £299.99 to give away.**

Each Global Knife is handmade using traditional samurai sword craftsmanship. Lightweight and perfectly balanced, they are perfect for those who love to cook. The 30th Anniversary Six Piece Knife Block Set contains a 20cm Fluted Cook's Knife, a 14cm Vegetable Chopper, a 16cm Bread/Bagel Knife, a 9cm Paring Knife and an 11cm Utility Knife.

To see the full range from Milly's Store go to [www.millyskitchenstore.co.uk](http://www.millyskitchenstore.co.uk)



**1  
TO GIVE  
AWAY**

**Milly's Store**  
Est 1999  
never pay more

PLEASE NOTE: this is an age-restricted product. Knives cannot be supplied to anyone under 18. When entering this competition, you are confirming that you are 18 or older. The winner may be asked to provide identification.

## SAY GOODBYE TO SOGGY SOCKS!

Backdoorshoes was established in 2006 when the owner, who had an office at the end of the garden, got fed up with having wet socks and cold feet and decided he needed shoes that could be kept by the back door. They're perfect for quick trips into the garden, feeding the animals or nipping out to the bins or the shed.

Lightweight and comfortable, Backdoorshoes have removable washable insoles and are made of a foam formula that will not crack or perish. They slip on and off easily, so there's no fiddling with boots or laces. Available in men's and women's ranges in sizes 3 to 13, they cost £20 plus p&p. New additions to the wide range of unique, vibrant designs include Garden Vegetables, Cats and Mixed Roses, and a children's range will be launched this summer.

There's a special offer for KG readers: order online before April 30, 2015, and enter code

KG10%DISC at the checkout to claim a 10% discount.

This offer is only available online and does not include p&p. For more information visit [www.backdoorshoes.co.uk](http://www.backdoorshoes.co.uk)

**We have 12 pairs of Backdoorshoes worth £20 to give away. Winners will have a choice of Garden Vegetables (for ladies) or Mulchwood (for men).**



**backdoorshoes**



# WIN A POLYTUNNEL WORTH OVER £650!

*Kitchen Garden* has teamed up with Premier Polytunnels to give one lucky reader the chance to win a 10ft wide x 20ft long polytunnel worth £652!

This top quality polytunnel package is the most popular of the Premier Polytunnels garden range and is recommended by *Kitchen Garden* magazine.

It is supplied as a complete unit ready for assembly onto a soil base and includes ALL of the following:

- 28mm diameter steel frame.
- Timber door frame and a single door at the front, with a timber end frame with dummy door at the rear.

- 720 gauge/180 micron thermal anti drip polythene cover.
- Anti hot spot tape.
- Anchor plates.
- Crop bars.
- Timber base rails.

A must for any garden or allotment, a polytunnel puts you in control – whatever your pleasure, whatever the weather, it will grow better in a Premier Polytunnel.



TO ENTER  
OUR POLYTUNNEL  
COMPETITION  
FILL IN THE  
COUPON BELOW.  
FOR ALL OTHER  
GIVEAWAYS,  
SEE PAGE  
104



**HOW TO ENTER:** To be in with a chance of winning this fantastic prize, simply complete the coupon and return to: *Kitchen Garden* Magazine March/April 2015 Polytunnel Competition, Mortons Media Group Ltd, PO Box 99, Horncastle, Lincs LN9 6LZ. Closing date April 2, 2015.

**Alternatively, you can enter online at [www.kitchengarden.co.uk](http://www.kitchengarden.co.uk)**

Terms and conditions apply. For full terms and conditions, please see [www.kitchengarden.co.uk](http://www.kitchengarden.co.uk). No cash alternatives are available. Winners will be the first two names drawn at random.

Name: .....

Address: .....

Postcode: .....

Telephone: .....

Email: .....

Only tick this box if you do not wish to receive information from Mortons Media Group regarding or relating to current offers of products or services (including discounted subscription offers) via email/post/phone. ☐ On occasion Mortons Media Group Ltd may permit third parties, that we deem to be reputable, to contact you by email/post /phone/fax regarding information relating to current offers of products or services which we believe may be of interest to our readers. If you wish to receive such offers please tick this box. ☐ Closing date: April 2, 2015



# READER OFFERS



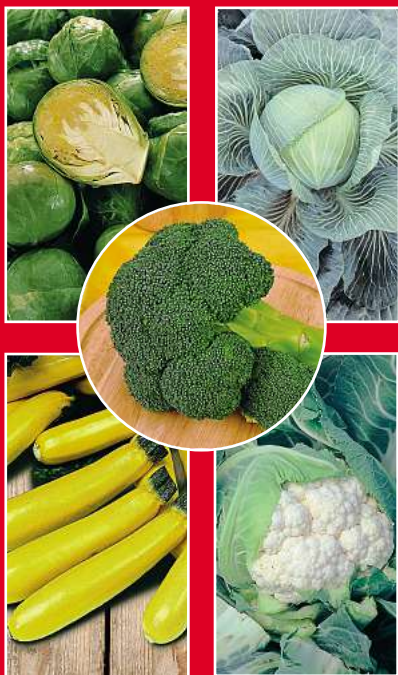
EXCLUSIVE SAVINGS TO HELP MAKE YOUR MONEY GO FURTHER

## FREE\* WITH EVERY ORDER VEGETABLE PLANT COLLECTION

20 BRASSICA PLANTS PLUS 3  
COURGETTE 'SOLEIL' PLANTS

Get this superb collection free when you place an order for any of the vegetable plants opposite. Simply add item 48490 to your order and quote promo code KG15APR. Worth £13.90, the collection includes:

- 5 plants of Brussels sprout 'Brontë F1'
- 5 plants of Cabbage 'Kilaton F1'
- 5 plants of Cauliflower 'Moby Dick F1'
- 5 plants of Calabrese 'Ironman F1'
- 3 plants of Courgette 'Soleil F1'



### KALE 'NERO DI TOSCANA'

Very popular with chefs, it gives plenty of long, dark green, deeply savoyed leaves with a unique texture and flavour. Can be grown as baby leaves for adding to salads. Harvest from September.

**10  
PLANTS  
£6.45**



**FREE  
PLANTS  
WORTH  
£13.90!**



**15  
PLANTS  
£6.45**

### BRUSSELS SPROUT 'CRISPUS F1'

If club root is a problem in your plot, then this early to mid season hybrid is for you. The dark green buttons stand in good condition on the tall plants for several weeks. Harvest September to November.

### BROCCOLI 'TENDERSTEM F1'

**20  
PLANTS  
£6.45**

Delicious, long and tender stems are a real treat. Remove main head to encourage sideshoots. Harvest from August.



### SWEETCORN 'SWIFT F1'

**16  
PLANTS  
£6.45**

Arguably the best of all sweetcorn, 'Swift F1' is 'extra tendersweet' and remarkably early. Its heavy crops are incredibly sweet, juicy, tender and succulent. Harvest from August.



### BUTTERNUT SQUASH 'HARRIER F1'

**3  
PLANTS  
£6.45**

Ready for picking in three months with great yields of medium-sized, sweet-fleshed fruits. Harvest from August.



GET THESE GREAT OFFERS AND MANY MORE ONLINE:



Get 10 plants each of red-flowered 'Firestorm' and white-flowered 'Moonlight'. Both are self-pollinating, give good, reliable yields even in non-favourable conditions. Harvest from August.

Get 10 plants each of red-flowered 'Firestorm' and white-flowered 'Moonlight'. Both are self-pollinating, give good, reliable yields even in non-favourable conditions. Harvest from August.

**20  
PLANTS  
£10.90**

10 OF EACH



**40  
PLANTS  
£7.45**

This mild onion from the Cevennes region in south central France and is highly prized by chefs for its mild and deliciously sweet flavour. This superb flavour can be savoured when eating raw or cooked and the satin-like appearance and pale skin makes it an attractive addition to any plate.

This leek plants collection is made up of two varieties chosen for their different cropping time to give you leeks ready for digging for up to eight months of the year. The first variety, 'Carlton F1', is ready for harvesting from August and will stand in the ground through to October with 'Sultan F1' taking over in November and providing crops right through to March.



**30 OF EACH**

**60  
PLANTS  
£8.90**

**ORDERING ONLINE? VISIT [WWW.KITCHENGARDENSHOP.CO.UK](http://WWW.KITCHENGARDENSHOP.CO.UK) AND ENTER CODE KG15APR WHEN PROMPTED TO RECEIVE YOUR READER DISCOUNT**

The pointed or sweetheart cabbages in this collection have a looser leaf, a much sweeter flavour and a softer texture than the ball-headed types. Our collection includes three great-tasting varieties:

■ **'WINTER JEWEL'** – This disease-resistant variety forms a tasty, loose heart.

■ **'ADVANTAGE F1'** – This versatile performer is tender and delicious when grown as unhearted greens or left to form a heart.

■ **'DUTCHMAN F1'** – An incredibly mild and sweet 'Duchy' type which is both very attractive and a good cropper.



**30  
PLANTS  
£9.90**

**10 OF EACH**



Call the credit card and debit card order hotline on 0845 371 0532 (open 8am to 8pm, seven days a week) and quote code KG15APR. Only orders above £10 by phone. Or send a cheque made payable to D T Brown Seeds to Kitchen Garden April Offers (KG15APR), D T Brown Seeds, Western Avenue, Matrix Park, Chorley, Lancs PR7 7NB.

Veg plants will be delivered from May 2015. Offers are subject to availability. Delivery to UK mainland only.

QTY	OFFER	PRICE	SUBTOTAL
1	Runner Bean Collection (47782)	10.90	
	Brussels Sprout 'Crispust F1' (42640)	£6.45	
	Sweetcorn 'Swift F1' (42170)	£6.45	
	Leek Collection (40655)	£8.90	
	Oignons doux de Bourbonnais (41552)	£7.45	
	Broccoli 'Tenderstem F1' (41930)	£6.45	
	Squash Butternut 'Harrier F1' (48127)	£6.45	
	Sweetheart Cabbage Collection (48489)	£9.90	
	Kale 'Nero di Toscana' (46860)	£6.45	
20 FREE BRASSICAS AND 3 FREE COURGETTES WHEN YOU ORDER ANY OF THE ABOVE! (48490)			FREE
Post and packaging			£4.95
<b>Total</b>			<b>£</b>

I enclose my cheque payable to: D T Brown OR  
please debit my Mastercard/Visa account  
(delete as applicable).

Please fill in Card No below.

[illegible]

Expiry Date

Security No: \_\_\_\_\_ (Last 3 digits on the back of card)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address

Postcode

Telephone

Email Address

Tick if you do not wish to receive further product information from D T Brown. Offers are subject to availability. ☐





# Whatever your pleasure, whatever the weather,

*It will grow better in a Premier Polytunnel*



*Larger Diameter Steel*

*Wide Doors*

*5 Layer Thermal Anti Drip Polythene*

*Construction Helpline*

*30 Years Experience*



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**or call for a brochure: 01282 811250**  
**or email: [sales@premierpolytunnels.co.uk](mailto:sales@premierpolytunnels.co.uk)**





# DIARY DATES

WHY NOT ENJOY A GARDENING SHOW, FESTIVAL OR ENROL ON A COURSE?

## GARDEN SHOWS AND FESTIVALS

### SPRING GARDENING FESTIVAL

**APRIL 10-12.** Capel Manor Gardens, Bullsmoor Lane, Enfield, Middlesex. 10am-5pm. 08456 122122

[www.capelmanorgardens.co.uk](http://www.capelmanorgardens.co.uk)

### HANAMI FESTIVAL APRIL 11.

Brogdale Farm, Faversham, Kent. Celebration of the cherry blossom at the home of the National Fruit Collection. 10am-4pm. 01795 536250

[www.brogdalecollections.co.uk](http://www.brogdalecollections.co.uk)

### RHS CARDIFF FLOWER SHOW APRIL

**17-19.** Bute Park, Cardiff Castle.

[www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events](http://www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events)

### LOSELEY SPRING GARDEN SHOW

**APRIL 17-19.** Loseley Park, Guildford, Surrey. Plant and food stalls in the walled garden. 10am-5pm. 01483 304440

[www.loseleypark.co.uk](http://www.loseleypark.co.uk)

### HARROGATE SPRING FLOWER

**SHOW APRIL 23-26.** Great Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate, North Yorkshire. 01423 546158

[www.flowershow.org.uk](http://www.flowershow.org.uk)

### RHS MALVERN SPRING FESTIVAL

**MAY 7-10.** The Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire. 9am-6pm. 01684 584900

[www.threecounties.co.uk/rhsmalvern](http://www.threecounties.co.uk/rhsmalvern)

### GARDEN SHOW IRELAND MAY 8-10.

Antrim Castle Gardens, Randalstown Road, Antrim. 10am-6pm.

[www.gardenshowireland.com](http://www.gardenshowireland.com)

### DEVON CHILLI FIESTA MAY 9-10.

RHS Garden Rosemoor, Great Torrington, Devon. 10-4pm. 0845 265 8072

[www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/rosemoor](http://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/rosemoor)

### ROYAL WELSH SPRING FESTIVAL

**MAY 16-17.** Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells, Powys. Smallholding, gardening and sustainable living. 01982 553683

[www.rwas.co.uk](http://www.rwas.co.uk)

### RHS CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW MAY

**19-23.** Royal Hospital, Chelsea, London SW3.

[www.rhs.org.uk/flowershows](http://www.rhs.org.uk/flowershows)

### GARDENING SCOTLAND MAY 29-

**31.** Royal Highland Centre, Edinburgh. 10am-5pm.

[www.gardeningscotland.com](http://www.gardeningscotland.com)

## TOURS & OPEN DAYS

### JEKKA'S HERB FARM OPEN DAYS

**APRIL 3-4, MAY 1, 2 AND 31.**

Jekka's Herb Farm, Rose Cottage, Shellards Lane, Alveston, Bristol. Look round the herb garden, and buy herbs and seeds. 10am-4pm. 01454 418878

[www.jekkasherbfarm.com](http://www.jekkasherbfarm.com)



Celebrate the cherry blossom at Brogdale (April 11) – the National Fruit Collection there includes over 280 cherry varieties

### GARDEN OPEN DAY APRIL 11.

River Cottage HQ, Park Farm, nr Axminster, Devon. Meet the experts – talks, Q&A, kitchen garden tours. 9.30am-4pm. 01297 630300

[www.rivercottage.net](http://www.rivercottage.net)

### FRUIT SCIENCE TOUR APRIL 14 OR

**MAY 15.** East Malling Research

Centre, Kent. History of fruit

science at the research centre.

Book on 01732 523755

[www.emr.ac.uk/short-courses](http://www.emr.ac.uk/short-courses)

### RHUBARB WEEKEND MAY 9-10.

Clumber Park, Worksop, Nottinghamshire. Variety tastings, demonstrations, tours – to celebrate Clumber's National Rhubarb Collection. 12-4pm. 01909 544904

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/clumber-park/](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/clumber-park/)

### RESTORATION OF THE KITCHEN

**GARDEN MAY 13.** Tatton Park,

Knutsford, Cheshire. Talk and

tour, 2-4pm. Book on 01625

374428

[www.tattonpark.org.uk](http://www.tattonpark.org.uk)

### SPRING VEGETABLE WEEKEND

**MAY 16-17.** Barnsdale Gardens, The Avenue, Exton, Oakham, Rutland. View productive areas normally off limits; chat with the experts. 11am-4pm. 01572 813200

[www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk](http://www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk)

## VEG & FRUIT GROWING COURSES

### NO-DIG GARDENING APRIL 1

**OR 11.** Alhampton, Shepton Mallet, Somerset. Veg and fruit growing with Charles Dowding. 10.30am-4pm. Book on 01749 860292

[www.charlesdowding.co.uk](http://www.charlesdowding.co.uk)

### SPUDS AND MORE APRIL 2 OR 23.

Pennard Plants, The Walled Garden, East Pennard, Shepton Mallet, Somerset. Easy ways to produce your own food. 11am-3pm. 01749 860039

[www.pennardplants.com](http://www.pennardplants.com)

### VEGETABLES ALL YEAR ROUND

**APRIL 8.** Barnsdale Gardens, The Avenue, Exton, Oakham, Rutland. Make the most of your veg patch. 10am-3.30pm. Book on 01572 813200

[www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk](http://www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk) ►



Capel Manor's Spring Gardening Festival (April 10-12)

## PLEASE NOTE

*We have made every effort to ensure these details are correct at the time of going to press, but recommend you check with organisers before travelling.*



## KG APRIL GIVEAWAYS

**Simply fill in the details below and return to us at:** Kitchen Garden April-15 Giveaways, Mortons Media Group Ltd, PO Box 99, Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 6LZ. You can also enter online for free at: [www.kitchengarden.co.uk](http://www.kitchengarden.co.uk) Closing date for entries Friday, April 10, 2015.

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River Cottage HQ, home of Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's cookery school, has a garden open day on April 11

**THE ORNAMENTAL KITCHEN GARDEN APRIL 11-12.** Barnsdale Gardens, The Avenue, Exton, Oakham, Rutland. Grow flowers, fruit and veg together to create a colourful and productive garden. 10am-4.30pm. Book on 01572 813200 [www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk](http://www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk)  
**GET GROWING APRIL 12 OR MAY 12.** River Cottage HQ, Park Farm, nr Axminster, Devon. Skills and techniques to get the most from your growing space. 10am-5pm. 01297 630300 [www.rivercottage.net](http://www.rivercottage.net)

**GROWING AND PRUNING FIGS, STONE FRUITS, VINES AND LOQUATS APRIL 18.** Waterperry Gardens, near Wheatley, Oxfordshire. Talk and demonstrations on how to produce the best crops. 10.30am-3.30pm. 01844 339254 [www.waterperrygardens.co.uk](http://www.waterperrygardens.co.uk)

**THE VEGETABLE GARDEN IN SUMMER MAY 6 OR 7.** RHS Garden Wisley, Woking, Surrey. Practical day on summer veg. 10.30am-4pm. Book on 0203 176 5830 [www.rhs.co.uk/gardens/wisley](http://www.rhs.co.uk/gardens/wisley)  
**FRAMEWORK GRAFTING MAY 6 OR 9.** Bradbourne House, East Malling, Kent. How to change the variety on a tree by different types of graft. 9.30am-3.30pm. Information and booking 01732 523755 [www.emr.ac.uk/short-courses](http://www.emr.ac.uk/short-courses)

**CARE OF FRUIT TREES MAY 16 OR 18.** Stanmer Park, Brighton, Sussex. Watering, pruning, feeding, tree health, harvesting. 9.30am-5pm. Book on 07746 185927 [www.brightonpermaculture.org.uk](http://www.brightonpermaculture.org.uk)  
**GROWING UNDER GLASS MAY 29.** Barnsdale Gardens, The Avenue, Exton, Oakham, Rutland. Get the most from a productive greenhouse or polytunnel. 10.30am-12.30pm. Book on 01572 813200 [www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk](http://www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk)

## HERBS AND CUT FLOWERS

**GROWING HERBS FOR THE KITCHEN APRIL 1.** RHS Garden Harlow Carr, Harrogate, Yorkshire. Propagation, cultivation and herb garden planning. 10am-4pm. Book on 02031 765830 [www.rhs.org.uk/harlowcarr](http://www.rhs.org.uk/harlowcarr)

**GROW YOUR OWN CUT FLOWERS APRIL 14.** Hidcote, near Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire. Flower growing masterclass. 9.30am-2.30pm. Book on 01386 439801 [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hidcote](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hidcote)

**HERBS AND HAND-TIED BUNCHES APRIL 21.** Doddington Hall, near Lincoln. How to propagate and cultivate culinary and medicinal herbs. 10am-4pm. Book on 07758 730462 [www.doddingtonhall.com](http://www.doddingtonhall.com)

**HERB PROPAGATION APRIL 25.** Jekka's Herb Farm, Rose Cottage, Shellards Lane, Alveston, Bristol. Practical master class with Jekka. 10am-4.30pm. Book on 01454 418878 [www.jekkasherbfarm.com](http://www.jekkasherbfarm.com)

**THE CUTTING GARDEN MAY 6.** Waterperry Gardens, Waterperry, nr Wheatley, Oxfordshire. How to grow flowers for cutting even in the smallest spaces. 10am-3.30pm. Book on 01844 339254 [www.waterperrygardens.co.uk](http://www.waterperrygardens.co.uk)

## OTHER COURSES

**COMPOSTING APRIL 13.** Barnsdale Gardens, The Avenue, Exton, Oakham, Rutland. Materials, bins and methods. 10.30am-12.30pm. Book on 01572 813200 [www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk](http://www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk)  
**INTRODUCTION TO BEEKEEPING APRIL 25.** Waterperry Gardens, Waterperry, nr Wheatley, Oxfordshire. Theory and demonstrations. 10am-3.30pm. Book on 01844 339254 [www.waterperrygardens.co.uk](http://www.waterperrygardens.co.uk) ■





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GET COOKING

# A taste of Spring

Step into April with Anna Pettigrew's scintillating spring recipes, featuring asparagus, radishes and rhubarb





make  
the most  
of your  
spring  
veg

## ASPARAGUS & MINT SLAW

Embrace this season's best asparagus by whipping up this fresh and crunchy spring slaw. Great served as a salad, with fish or in a pitta pocket.

### SERVES 4

- 4 shallots, thinly sliced
- 2 carrots, julienned
- 1 bunch asparagus, trimmed and shaved using a vegetable peeler
- ¼ head of red cabbage, thinly sliced
- 1 tbsp roughly chopped mint
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1. Whisk the olive oil, vinegar, sugar, salt and pepper in a large bowl until well combined. Then add the mint and garlic, stirring well.
2. Add the red cabbage, shallots, carrots and asparagus and toss to combine.
3. Serve.



## ASPARAGUS, WALNUT & BACON RAVIOLI

Prepare this pasta dish of asparagus and walnuts on a spring day. It's delicious and very quick and easy to prepare.

### SERVES 4

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 shallot, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled and minced
- 1 bunch of asparagus, halved
- 4 rashers of free-range unsmoked back bacon, diced
- 50g (1¾oz) walnuts, chopped
- 4 tbsp single cream
- 2 packets of four cheese ravioli (or your favourite flavour)
- a sprig of rosemary, chopped

1. Put a large pan of water on the boil.
2. Next, gently heat the onion and garlic in the olive oil, then add the bacon and rosemary. Fry for 2 minutes, taking care not to burn the garlic.
3. Add the asparagus halves and walnuts, stir in and cook for 3 minutes.
4. Once the pan of water is boiling, add the ravioli and cook for 2 minutes. Then drain and set aside.
5. Add the cream to the asparagus pan and cook for 1 minute, then add the drained pasta to the pan and stir to coat the ravioli in the sauce.
6. Season to taste with salt and plenty of black pepper.
7. Serve immediately. ➤





## RYE BREAD & RADISH APPETISERS

If you are in need of some new inspiration for appetisers, look no further. Take advantage of your early spring radishes and pair them with tangy rye bread and creamy cheese.

### SERVES 4 AS AN APPETISER

- 4 slices of rye bread
- 6 radishes, sliced
- 125g (4oz) cream cheese, full fat
- 1 garlic clove, peeled and minced
- 1 tbsp white wine vinegar
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tbsp freshly chopped mixed herbs such as basil, tarragon, chives, parsley

1. Beat together the cream cheese, garlic and white wine vinegar and season well with salt and freshly ground black pepper.
2. Fold in the herbs.
3. Slice the rye bread into bite-size squares and top with the cheese and sliced radishes.



## TAPIOCA PUDDING WITH RHUBARB, RASPBERRY & ORANGE COMPOTE

This tapioca pudding is light and creamy and is perfectly paired with the tart rhubarb compote.

### SERVES 4

#### FOR THE PUDDING:

- 125g (4½oz) tapioca
- 700ml (24½fl oz) milk
- 50ml (1¾fl oz) double cream
- 1 tsp vanilla essence
- 1 tbsp sugar

#### FOR THE COMPOTE:

- 180g (6¼oz) rhubarb
- 160g (5½oz) raspberries
- 80g (2¾oz) sugar
- 1 orange, juice of

1. In a large saucepan, combine the rhubarb, raspberries and orange juice and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the sugar and cook for a further 10 minutes. Leave to cool.

2. In a separate large saucepan, combine the tapioca and milk and bring to the boil.

3. Reduce the heat to low, then cook for 20 minutes, stirring often so the tapioca doesn't stick.

4. Next add the cream and vanilla, stir well, then cook for a further 10 minutes. Set aside to cool.

5. Once cooled, divide the pudding between four ramekins or glasses and top with the rhubarb compote.



great for  
kids to  
help out  
with



## RHUBARB JAM BUTTERFLY CAKES

Sweet, elegant and very tempting, these little cakes are making the most of this season's rhubarb. They are great for kids to help out with too.

### MAKES 12

- 100g (3½oz) butter
- 100g (3½oz) caster sugar
- 2 large free-range eggs
- 100g (3½oz) self-raising flour
- 1 level tsp baking powder

### FOR THE JAM:

- 180g (6¼oz) rhubarb, chopped
- 60g (2oz) sugar
- ½ lemon, juice and zest of

### FOR THE FILLING:

- 200ml (6¾fl oz) whipping cream
- 1 tbsp icing sugar

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C/fan 160°C/gas mark 4. Line a cupcake tray with 12 paper cases.
2. Beat the butter and caster sugar together until light. Then add the egg, followed by the flour.
3. Beat well for 2-3 minutes, or until the mixture is well blended and smooth.
4. Fill each paper case with about a tablespoon of mixture.
5. Bake in the preheated oven for about 15-20 minutes, or until the cakes are well risen and golden.
6. Let the cakes cool completely on a wire rack.
7. Meanwhile, make the jam. In a saucepan, combine the rhubarb, lemon juice and zest and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes. If there is a lot of liquid, cook a bit longer over low heat.
8. Next, add the sugar and cook for a further 10-15 minutes. Leave to cool.
9. Once the jam is cool, whisk the whipping cream and icing sugar together, then spoon in 2 tablespoons of jam and mix in. Place the cream mixture into a piping bag. Set aside.
10. When the cakes are cool, cut a disc from the top of each cake leaving a little gap around the edge and cut this slice in half to create a butterfly.
11. Spoon a teaspoonful of rhubarb jam into each of the cake's dip. Then pipe a swirl of the cream filling on top of the rhubarb jam and place the half slices of cake on top to resemble the butterfly wings.
12. Dust the cakes with icing sugar and serve.



## RADISH & CLEMENTINE SALAD WITH A HONEY DRESSING

Sweet, crunchy and tangy! What more do you need from a salad? This dish is simple to prepare but looks amazing on your spring table. Add a few leaves of rocket and strips of pancetta if you want to serve it as a main course.

### SERVES 4 AS A STARTER

- 5 clementines, peeled and sliced
- 10 radishes, sliced

### FOR THE DRESSING:

- 1 tbsp honey
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1½ tbsp white wine vinegar
- 1 tsp rosemary, chopped
- a pinch of salt

1. Mix all the dressing ingredients in a bowl and whisk until well combined.
2. Arrange the sliced clementines and radishes on four plates and drizzle the dressing over.
3. Serve immediately. ■



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# LAST WORD



Alan's plot which he finds saves him money **INSET:** his lovely harvest of spuds

Alan Jobling from Greenhithe in Kent thinks even more growing spaces should be available to everyone who wants one

**I**t seems to be an all too common problem that councils fail to see the many benefits of allotments. I understand there is a need for housing (especially here in the south east) but can we not find a compromise between the two?

I am lucky to be in a town council area that has three sites and has one planned as part of a new housing estate due to open in 2016. It currently has 66 plots. I live in an area that is what can only be described as 'working class' for want of a better phrase and most households are not exactly well off (but then who is these days?).

In my understanding, allotments are a way for people to grow healthy fruits and veggies at a cheaper cost than shop bought, or at least that is why I took on a plot. It can be as cheap or as expensive hobby as you like. I prefer to keep it low cost, as one my household income isn't great and two it means the produce I grow really is cheaper.

With the increased global population, that is rising rapidly to a projected nine billion by 2050 and also global warming, which is already causing issues world-wide, the only way I see us all, as a planet, moving forward is breaking reliance on the heavy industrialisation of food growing, shipping and processing of all our food. The planet cannot sustain it.

We can all do our bit in helping protect our planet by growing what we can ourselves. But with more people living in flats and therefore less access to gardens and outdoor space, councils (or even private) allotment sites are even more necessary. I believe allotments are one step in helping the already fragile food supply.

The increase in demand on foodstuffs is already out-ricing many low income families from accessing healthy foods and freak events caused by global warming are only exacerbating the food production costs. For some families the idea of everyone eating five (or is it seven?) a day is just too expensive.

Another added benefit, especially for low income families, is being able to eat their own produce improving their diet and with the exercise that it takes to grow it also has health benefits.

With all this said I get completely angered when I hear of yet more allotments being built upon. Why can't we find a balance between the two? In my mind allotments are just as important now as they were during the wars. With an ever growing population we are all heading for trouble and sky high prices if we all carry on as we are. So let's all get growing and do our bit knowing that we certainly are making a real difference.

Check out Alan's growing blog at [plot17allotmentlife.blogspot.co.uk](http://plot17allotmentlife.blogspot.co.uk) ■



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